Do the speakers in Acts use different hermeneutics for different OT genres?

Abstract: *The Book of Acts' quotations of OT texts have been explained in myriad ways: as everything from midrash, to rhetoric, to opportunistic proof-texting. This presents a confusing and unprincipled picture of apostolic hermeneutics. But is there a principle behind this diversity? Drawing on modern Genre Theory's observation that genres create distinct hermeneutical roles for the reader, this article tests the hypothesis that the hermeneutical structures employed by the apostles to interpret and apply the OT vary depending on the genre of the source material. If the genre of the source text is a psalm, then nine times out of ten the text will be interpreted typologically to make a Christological point.*

Hans Robert Jauss has justly observed that "the abundance of literary forms and genres ascertainable in the Old and New Testaments is astonishing" — from laments, to heroic prose, to genealogy, to riddle.[1] Modern theories of genre suggest that each of these genres asks something different of its reader: the task of understanding a poem is different to the task of understanding a letter. Indeed, this is such a foundational principle that introductory guides to reading the Bible are often arranged with different sections for different genres: epistle, narrative, parable, psalm, and so on.[2] Yet philosophical and theological hermeneutics have often been curiously disinterested in questions of genre. Even discussions around

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[1] Hans-Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (trans. Timothy Bahti; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 102.

[2] E.g. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Fourth edition; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

intertextuality and the Bible have focused on lexical connections rather than the more diffuse networks between texts based on genre.[3] Accordingly, attempts to understand the NT's use of the OT have often pointed to a dizzyingly diverse array of midrashic techniques, without considering whether there is, as genre theory suggests, some correlation between the genre of the source text and the hermeneutical structures used to interpret it.

Can the many different genres of the OT help explain the many different hermeneutical methods which are applied to those texts in the NT? In other words, does the fact that a text is a psalm, and not historical narrative, make a difference to the way it is interpreted and applied? This article goes some way to answering this question. First, I outline what modern Genre Theory offers for studying these complex intertextual relationships between biblical texts. Second, taking the OT quotations in the speeches of Acts as a case study, I test the hypothesis that the apostles are more likely to use typological structures when the genre of the source material is a psalm, as opposed to a narrative, prophetic or legal text. Nine times out of ten the pattern holds: if the genre of the source text is a psalm, then the text will be interpreted typologically to make a Christological point. In contrast, narrative, prophetic and legal texts receive different kinds of treatment. Third, I consider what it is about a psalm that invites certain interpretive practices over others. Finally, I consider how genre helps explain some of the more substantial differences between the quoted texts and the LXX.

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[3] A recent exception is Tim Finlay, "Genres, Intertextuality, Bible Software, and Speech Acts," in *Second Wave Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Marianne Grohmann and Hyun Chul Paul Kim; Altanta: SBL Press, 2019).

I. GENRE THEORY AND THE HERMENEUTICAL TASK OF THE READER

Genre Theory has cycled in and out of fashion since Aristotle. It reached its high point in nineteenth-century German literature with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), in twentieth-century Russian literature with Vladimir Propp's scientific dissection of the 31 possible character functions in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1927), and in modern English literature with Northrop Frye's anatomy of the four master genres in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). Yet despite structuralists' enthusiasm for finding deep connections between the forms of literature, the study of genre has largely come off second best in a series of bouts with romanticism. A true work of art is a unique aesthetic object and so — declared Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) — we can leave classification to the librarians.[4]

Things looked grim for genre in the mid twentieth-century, but in recent decades exciting work at the intersection of literature, education and sociology has reignited the study of genre — most notably under the banner of an interdisciplinary approach called Rhetorical Genre Studies.[5] This can be seen as part of a broader trend in Genre Theory towards what I will call "Historical Descriptive" approaches. These are an obvious improvement on the prescriptive systems of classification that reigned from Aristotle to Goethe. For Alastair Fowler, Hans Robert Jauss and John Frow, genres are best seen not as normative laws of literature, nor as immutable logical classes, but as overlapping groups that are historically contingent and

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[4] Benedetto Croce, "Criticism of the Theory of Artistic and Literary Kinds," in *Modern Genre Theory* (ed. David Duff; Essex: Pearson, 2000), 25, 27-8; Rene Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 46.

[5] See Richard Coe, Lorelei Lingard, and Tatiana Teslenko, eds., *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre: Strategies for Stability and Change* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2002); Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, eds., *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy* (West Lafayette: Parlor, 2010).

therefore subject to change.[6] This liberates us from the anxious task of finding forever firm borders and optimal organizing principles for genres.[7] Rather than correctly defined classes, we understand what a genre is based on certain prototypes, from which texts can be more or less closely related in a contingent and historical system.[8] Genres are not set in stone, but nor are they ephemeral — rather, as Catherine Schryer puts it, they are "stabilised-for-now."[9] Viewing genre this way defeats the classic romantic objection that great texts always break the rules of the genre they are meant to belong to. On the contrary, texts do not "belong to" genres, nor is creativity shackled by their prescriptions; genres provide resources that are used by writers and readers to make meaning.[10]

Historical Descriptive understandings of genre offer powerful tools for analyzing the kinds of complex intertextual relationships that the canon of scripture confronts us with. Genres need no longer to be divided up according to a single organizing principle, which means that a generic relationship can be characterized by anything: meter, theological concerns, social

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[6] Jauss, *Reception*, 80; Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), v, 221; John Frow, *Genre* (Second edition; New York: Routledge, 2015), 76-78.

[7] Fowler, *Kinds*, 249.

[8] Frow, *Genre*, 59–60.

[9] Cited in Frow, *Genre*, 30. C.f. Mikhail Bakhtin's "relatively stable types": *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 83.

[10] Fowler, *Kinds*, 22; Frow, *Genre*, 2; Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," *Philosophy Today* 17.2 (1973): 135. Frow further clarifies that a text's relationship is not with "a" genre but with a field or economy of genres. C.f. Mary Gerhart, "Generic Competence in Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 43 (1988): 34.

dynamics, and so on.[11] Texts can be analyzed according to their simultaneous relationships with multiple genres;[12] this is especially useful for biblical texts which often resist simple classification. The historical nature of genre provides a crucial link between intention and reception of a work. Where the social function of a text is lost in a distant past, Jauss considers the possibility that the historical norms of the audience can "still be reconstructed through the horizon of expectations of a genre system that pre-constituted the intention of the works as well as the understanding of the audience."[13] Picking up Hans-Georg Gadamer's vocabulary, we might say that genre helps mediate "tradition" to us in a granular way, because as our generic competence expands our "horizon" expands to better account for the traditionary text.

Yet the most significant contribution Genre Theory makes to understanding intertextual relationships within the canon is to do with the role genre assigns to readers. Frow sees genre as a function of reading, a reader's hypothesis about "the-kind-of-thing-this-is."[14] In this vein, Mary Gerhart observes that readers of a biblical text set about understanding it by testing out different genres on the text to see if it makes sense.[15] The implication of this observation for hermeneutics is so obvious that it is easy to underestimate its significance: different genres

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[11] Fowler, *Kinds*, 58; Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (Mitcham: Peregrine Books, 1963), 231. Fowler defines "kinds" as "a type of literary work of a definite size, marked by a complex of substantive and formal features that always include a distinctive (though not usually unique) external structure" (74).

[12] Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 85.

[13] Jauss, *Reception*, 108.

[14] Frow, *Genre*, 111. C.f. Hirsch's "the-kind-of-thing-this-is."

[15] Gerhart, "Generic Competence," 36; see also "Generic Studies: Their Renewed Importance in Religious and Literary Interpretation," *JAAR* XLV.3 (1977): 316. Here Gerhart is following Paul Ricoeur's notions of generic competence as a means of production, both for readers and authors.

call readers to play different hermeneutical roles. Fowler gives the example of a detective novel that sets the reader the conventional task of seeing through layers of misdirection to identify the killer.[16] This readerly role is quite different to what a proverb, or an email, requires of us.

The relationship between genre and the role of the reader may be obvious, but it is also part of the dynamic of understanding that philosophical and theological hermeneutics routinely neglect. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, for instance, struggles to accommodate the different hermeneutical tasks that legal, scriptural and poetic texts seem to require.[17] Genre Theory provides a vital missing piece: showing how the genre of a text supplies the reader with guidelines for responsible reading — although the reader will not always choose follow those guidelines.[18]

II. TESTING THE HYPOTHESIS

A considerable amount of scholarly effort has been expended trying to explain the principles at work in the use of the OT in Acts. The diverse strategies employed by the apostles to exegete the OT are often explained with reference to rabbinic techniques, their rhetorical situation, or just plain opportunistic proof-texting. However, as enjoyable as it is to play the game of spot-the-midrashic-method, this approach leaves us with a confusing picture of NT hermeneutics as a whole: each speaker in Acts seems to use completely different techniques.

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[16] Fowler, *Kinds*, 72.

[17] Compare *Truth and Method* 339 with his discussion of scriptural texts in Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hermeneutique Et Theologie [A77/04]," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 51.Jg 4 Oktober (1977): 391. See also Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 328.

[18] Frow, *Genre*, 111, 118.

Sometimes it looks like a *qal wahomer*, sometimes it is a *pesher*, sometimes perhaps a *gezerah shawah,* or other times something completely different. Is there any consistent hermeneutical principle in Acts, or does anything go so long as it proves that Jesus is the Christ?

I do not believe that the apostles are random or unprincipled in their exegesis. More likely, there is a piece of the hermeneutical puzzle we are missing. My hypothesis is that the hermeneutical strategies employed by the apostles to read the OT depend, at least in part, on the genre of the source material. Specifically, the genre of psalm makes the source text much more likely to be interpreted Christologically, using a typological lens.

To test my hypothesis, I did an analysis of all the substantial OT quotations noted in the apparatus of UBS5, noting the speaker, the source text, the genre of that source text, and any differences from the LXX. I then set about categorizing each use of the OT according to its hermeneutical lens: typological, promise-fulfilment, salvation historical, and so on.

Before considering how each psalm is used in Acts, I will briefly summarize what I found about the use of other genres: prophetic, narrative, and legal texts. This will provide the background against which my hypothesis about the distinctive use of psalms can be assessed.

1. *Prophetic texts.* There are nine main examples in Acts of prophetic genre texts being used by Christians. Four of these references are to the minor prophets: Joel features in Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2), Amos in both Stephen's and James' speeches (Acts 7 and 15), and Habakkuk in Paul's Antioch speech (Acts 13). Not surprisingly, five quotations are from Isaiah: once in Stephen's speech (Acts 7), once in Philip's conversation with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), twice in Paul's speeches in Antioch (Acts 13), and once in his final speech in Rome (Acts 28).

There are a couple of examples of Christological use of this prophetic source material (Acts 8:32–35 with Isaiah 53:7–8, and Acts 13:34 with Isaiah 55:3) and these could potentially be regarded as examples of a typological structure. For instance, in Acts 8:32–35 the possibility of a typological relationship between Isaiah's words and Jesus is raised by the eunuch's suggestion that the suffering could refer to Isaiah's own experience. However, it does seem here that a more direct route is being taken than typology would imply, and unlike the emphasis on the Davidic king in the application of the Psalms to Jesus, the person of the prophet receives little attention except as the mouthpiece for the prophecy. I therefore distinguish between what here appears to be a this-is-that (*pesher*) application of an Isaianic oracle, and the kind of typological application typical of the Davidic psalms.

Yet even if we accept that some of these prophetic texts are potentially being used typologically, the range of hermeneutical structures used with prophetic genre texts is obviously broad – much broader than we will see with psalms. Often the events of the present are being interpreted or justified using this-is-that or fulfilment structures, most obviously in Acts 2:16–21 where Peter interprets the Pentecost tongues by saying "this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel." Something similar happens with Isaiah 49:6 in Acts 13:47, and Amos 9 in Acts 15.

Prophetic texts can also supply a direct example or warning (as with Habakkuk 1:5 in Acts 13:41, and Isaiah 6 in Acts 28). The ethical application of the source text is sometimes based on an implicit theological or anthropological argument by analogy: the words of Isaiah about God's transcendence and intolerance of false worship can indict the temple officials in Stephen's day in Acts 7:48–50 because God is still transcendent, and humans are still prone to false worship.

Passage	Speaker	Source text	Citation formula	Differences from LXX	Hermeneutical method
Acts 2:16–21	Peter	Joel 2:28–32	"this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel"	14 additions, minimal impact	This-is-that, referring to Christian tongues
Acts 7:42–43	Stephen	Amos 5:27	"as it is written in the book of the prophets"	Two interpretive changes	Anthropological, ethical warnings, referring to Israel's sin
Acts 7:48–50	Stephen	Isaiah 66:1–2	"as the prophet says"	–	Theological, ethical warnings, referring to God's transcendence
Acts 8:32–35	Philip / Narrator	Isaiah 53:7–8	"now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this"	–	This-is-that (or typological), referring to Christ
Acts 13:34	Paul	Isaiah 55:3	"God has spoken in this way"	Context changed	Fulfilment (typological?), referring to Christ
Acts 13:40–41	Paul	Habakkuk 1:5	"lest what is said in the prophets should come about"	Some but sense is the same	Exemplary warning, referring to people's scoffing
Acts 13:47	Paul	Isaiah 49:6	"For so the Lord has commanded us, saying:"	Minimal	Fulfilment (or typological), referring to apostolic ministry to the Gentiles
Acts 15:15–18	James	Amos 9:11–12	"The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written" … "says the Lord"	–	Fulfilment, this-is-that, referring to the Gentiles

Acts 28:25–26	Paul	Isaiah 6:9–10	"The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet"	–	Anthropological, ethical warning, referring to people's stubbornness

In summary, prophetic texts receive a range of hermeneutical treatments, typically this-is-that, promise-fulfilment, and ethical warnings. This contrasts, as we will see, with the more uniform typological and Christological application of psalms.

2. *Narrative texts.* The use of biblical narrative texts from Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy is distinct from prophetic texts (and also, as we will see, from psalms). Notably, of the eleven direct quotations considered, nine are direct speech from pivotal moments in the stories. Michael Whitenton argues that when Stephen retells the story of Israel to a hostile crowd in Acts 7, his hermeneutical strategy is determined by his Greco-Roman rhetorical method, drawing on existing Jewish traditions to persuade his audience of his argument.[19] No doubt the horizon of an audience is important – especially when that audience is a murderous one! Yet the narrative genre of the material he is reworking seems even more determinative. Stephen is creative in the selection and retelling of events, but it is a different type of creativity to Peter's wholesale recontextualization of the psalms in Acts 1 which will be discussed below. Unlike the psalms and prophetic genres, the original context of the promises within the narrative source material is foregrounded.[20] The historical context of these promises is supplied through Stephen's own summaries, with moments of verbal similarity to the canonical storytellers anchoring and authorizing the narrative. Peter's use of the psalms

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[19] Michael R. Whitenton, "Rewriting Abraham and Joseph," *Novum Testamentum* 54 (2012): 166.

[20] There is some potential overlap between these narrative texts and the prophetic genre considered above, as five of the quotations are God's promises to his people, and another is Moses's prophecy about the future: the primary genre of narrative has an embedded secondary genre of prophecy.

requires his audience to dislocate and relocate the quotations into a new context, sometimes changing the psalm to better fit the new context; Stephen's argument relies on his audience identifying the original context of those quotations in order to weave together his own digest of Israel's history.

The overall hermeneutic applied to narrative texts, therefore, is much more anchored in salvation history. The immediate fulfilment of the promise in the present is not as directly on view. In the rehearsal of the details of Abraham's story, the point is to establish a diachronic relationship between God's promises to Abraham and the Christ event through salvation history, rather than through the more direct structure of this-is-that or typology. The point that the text is being applied to make is quite different as well: in much of Stephen's speech the reason for quoting prophecy is not to establish its fulfilment, but to make an ethical point based on of a shared sinful anthropology.

Passage	Speaker	Source text	Citation formula	Differences from LXX	Hermeneutical method
Acts 3:13	Peter	Exodus 3:6 (God's direct speech)	–	Minor	Theological, salvation-historical
Acts 3:21–23	Peter	Deuteronomy 18:15–19 (Moses's direct speech)	"all that God said by the prophets…for Moses said..."	Paraphrase	Fulfilment (or typological), referring to Christ
Acts 3:24–25	Peter	Genesis 22:18, with 12:3; 8:18. Possibly also Psalms 21:28; 71:17	"saying to Abraham…"	Paraphrase, composite	Promise and fulfilment, salvation-historical

		(God's direct speech)			
Acts 7:3, 5	Stephen	Genesis 12:1; 17:8 (God's direct speech)	"said to him…"	Minor	Salvation-historical, anthropology, exemplary
Acts 7:6–7	Stephen	Genesis 15:13–14 (God's direct speech)	"God spoke in this way…"	Some paraphrasing	Salvation-historical, anthropology, exemplary
Acts 7:10–11	Stephen	Genesis 41:37–44, 54; 42:5	–	Potential paraphrase or composite	Salvation-historical, anthropology, exemplary
Acts 7:18	Stephen	Exodus 1:8	–	–	Salvation-historical, anthropology, exemplary
Acts 7:27	Stephen	Exodus 2:13–14 (direct speech of Israelites)	"…saying…"	–	Salvation-historical, anthropology, exemplary
Acts 7:30–34	Stephen	Exodus 3:2–10 (God's direct speech)	"…the voice of the Lord came…the Lord said to him:"	Paraphrase	Salvation-historical, anthropology, exemplary
Acts 7:35	Stephen	Exodus 2:14 (direct speech of Israelites)	"…they said…"	–	Salvation-historical, anthropology, exemplary
Acts 7:40	Stephen	Exodus 32:1, 23 (direct speech of Israelites)	"…they told Aaron…"	Minor	Salvation-historical, anthropology, exemplary

3. *Legal texts.* At the other end of the genre spectrum, there is one example of a citation from a legal text in Acts 23:5. Here Paul applies Exodus 22:28 directly to his own ethical behavior. The hermeneutic is a direct application of a binding prohibition to the circumstances of the present time: the leaders of the people are taken to include the current High Priest, and the addressee of the command (Israel) is taken to include Paul himself. The word of Moses here has both immediacy and authority over the situation, which is fitting for a legal text.

Passage	Speaker	Source text	Citation formula	Differences from LXX	Hermeneutical method
Acts 23:5	Paul	Exodus 22:28	"For it is written"	Minor	Direct ethical application

III. THE DISTINCTIVE USE OF PSALMS IN ACTS

Against this backdrop of prophetic, narrative, and legal texts the contrast with the dominant hermeneutical structure used to interpret psalms can be assessed. My hypothesis has been that the genre of psalm makes the source text much more likely to be interpreted Christologically, using a typological lens. By my count, there are ten times in Acts that a psalm is the source material for sustained apostolic exegesis, and I consider these in some detail now.

1. *Acts 1:16.* The first three occasions are part of a single argument in Peter's speech to the 120 disciples. At first, Peter simply refers to "the scripture":

> "Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas…"

The reference to David and the connection with Judas (the treacherous enemy of Messiah) hints at some kind of Christological structure. However, it is not yet clear which "scripture" he

means. We might guess that "through David" indicates one of the psalms, or the Book of Psalms as a whole, but in which psalm did the Holy Spirit speak about Judas? After an apparent editorial aside reminding us in gory detail what happened to Judas, Peter makes clear that he has in mind two psalms in particular.

2. *Acts 1:20a*.[21] Using a quotation from Psalm 68:26 LXX, Peter tries to make sense of the apostasy of one of the twelve:

> For it is written in the book of Psalms,
>
> Let his homestead become desolate,
>
> and let there be no one to live in it.[22]

3. *Acts 1:20b*. Peter continues with another quotation, this time from Psalm 108:8b LXX:

> And may another take his position.[23]

Commentators offer competing characterizations of the hermeneutical structure at play here, including *qal wahomer* (light-to-heavy), *shnei ketuvim* (two-verses-contradict), word association, tradition-driven proof texting, geography-driven poetry, and consonantal wordplay. Into this confusing mix of partial explanations, the intertextual dynamic of genre offers refreshing clarity. While form criticism's classical Genre Theory made it reluctant to describe psalms based on their content,[24] modern Genre Theory opens up the genre of "Davidic

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[21] This discussion of Psalms 68 and 108 summarizes my conclusions in "Gadamer, *Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*, and What to Do about Judas (Acts 1:12–22)," *ABR* 66 (2018): 43–58.

[22] Scripture from NRSV unless otherwise noted.

[23] My translation.

[24] Such reluctance is still seen today: e.g. Jamie A. Grant, "Singing the Cover Versions: Psalms, Reinterpretation and Biblical Theology in Acts 1–4," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 25.1 (2001): 35.

psalm" as one legitimate and important dimension of the overlapping relationship between texts. The MT and LXX superscriptions (לדוד, τῷ Δαυιδ) remind us that both psalms are traditionally read as a Davidic psalm. A core feature of this genre is its association, not only with a presumed historical author, but also with an entire tradition of messianic expectation.

This accounts for perhaps Peter's most important hermeneutical move: his direct application of the psalm to Judas. Ben Witherington observes that this use of a psalm differs from other examples recorded in the Gospels in that it is not strictly Christological: Psalm 68 is here applied prophetically to Judas, not the Christ.[25] Yet I argue that the application to Judas is dependent on a Christological typology structure for its first step. David speaks of the friend-betrayer-enemy of the Messiah in Psalm 68:26. Clearly Judas, the one who served as a guide for those who arrested Jesus, is an obvious candidate for this role. The application of the psalm to Judas builds upon the application of the psalm according to a Christological typology. If Jesus is the Messiah, then Jesus's friend-betrayer is the friend-betrayer-enemy of the Messiah.

A shorthand way to describe this hermeneutical move is as an "extended Christological typology". "Typology" is related to allegory, but whereas allegory understands two ideas in light of each other, typology is anchored in at both ends by an event, object or person, and this serves as a more definite limit on the meaning.[26] The typology in this case is "Christological" because it seeks to understand the events and personality of Jesus is in light of King David and his heirs. There is a strong prophetic theme inherent in this typology because of the important place that messianic hope has in the post exilic prophets. The typology is "extended" in this

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[25] Ben Witherington III, *Psalms Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality and Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 157.

[26] Thiselton, following R. P. C. Hanson: Anthony C. Thiselton, "Typology," in *The SPCK Dictionary of Theology and Hermeneutics* (London: SPCK, 2015).

case because it is seeking to understand the person of Judas and the event of his betrayal in light of the enemies of the Davidic king.

4. *Acts 2:25–28*. Peter again makes use of a Davidic psalm: this time Psalm 15:8–11 LXX. The reference is repeated as part of the same argument in Acts 2:31. The Davidic connection is explicit, both in Acts ("David says concerning him") and in the canonical book of Psalms ("of David"). Peter's testimony that "it was impossible for death to keep its hold" on Jesus (verse 24) is explained (conjunction γὰρ) by quoting David's confidence that "you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption."

Leonhard Goppelt argues that the use of Psalm 15 here (and more broadly the use of psalms about the suffering of a godly person in the Gospels) is best understood as typological exegesis: the psalm, ostensibly about David and the preservation of the godly man from death, becomes a "prediction in type" concerning the resurrection of the Christ and all in him.[27] Marshall disagrees, arguing that Peter's use of the psalm is prophetic rather than typological, because what is said of the Christ — that he was permanently rescued from death – is not true of the type, David, who did eventually die.[28] In my view, Marshall assumes too narrow a view of typology. For Geerhardus Vos, typology, like prophecy, is prospective, anticipating a future anti-type that surpasses the first historical reality.[29] The motion of typology is usually described as involving a "prophetic escalation,"[30] a "heightening," or a recognition that "there is

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[27] Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (trans. Donald H. Madvig; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 103, 22–23.

[28] I. Howard Marshall, "Acts," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2007), 538.

[29] Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 144.

[30] G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 14.

something here which corresponds to the substance of the OT parallels and yet is *greater*."[31]

As Beale points out, the type itself often gives clues that its meaning is not exhausted by the original historical reality; for example, the failure of a figure to live up to their intended commissioning within the OT points forward to a future complete fulfilment.[32] Verbal prophecy and typology are both prophetic, but while verbal prophecy anticipates direct fulfilment of its words, typology is fulfilled indirectly when the person, event or institution it describes are seen to foreshadow a later person, event or institution.[33]

The psalm in its original context certainly speaks of God vindicating his Messiah by delivering him from premature death: as such, it is not direct verbal prophecy, but applies sensibly to the event of David or his successors being saved from imminent death. Yet the psalm describes this salvation from imminent death using language which is poignant enough to evoke the ultimate case of salvation from death: the actual resurrection of a corpse. David could have said "you will not allow my enemy to kill me," but by saying "you will not abandon my soul into Hades" he leaves open the question of whether the Davidic Messiah has already found himself cast into Hades when the intervention occurs. The choice of Greek διαφθοράν, with its connotations of rot or decay, further opens the tantalizing possibility of a cadaverous interpretation.[34] Far from ruling against the typological function of the psalm, the more prosaic

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[31] Goppelt, *Typos*, 199. Italics his.

[32] Beale, *Handbook*, 15, 20, 65.

[33] Beale, *Handbook*, 17–18.

[34] For Barrett, the Hebrew gives the impression of a man protected from death (for now), while the Greek gives the sense of a deliverance from death itself: C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (vol. 1; London: T&T Clark, 1994), 144. However the semantic range of the Greek and Hebrew terms both provide for a degree of ambiguity, even if the Greek tips the balance slightly further towards the resurrection sense. שַׁחַת is a pit of dead things and so naturally the ideas of rottenness and destruction are never

salvation David experienced turns out to be only a partial glimpse of the greater salvation to come.

5. *Acts 2:34–35.*[35] Peter introduces a final climactic psalm as he lands his Pentecost sermon:

> For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,
>
> The Lord says to my Lord,
>
> Sit at my right hand,
>
> until I make your enemies your footstool. (Psalm 109:1 LXX)

The tradition of using this psalm as part of an argument for a high Christology has already been recorded by Luke on the lips of Jesus (Luke 20:41–44).[36] Here Jesus poses a question for the Judean scribes using the genre of a riddle. David, the author of the psalm, refers to the messiah as his "Lord" — but how can this one figure outrank David, and yet also be his descendant? No answer is recorded to Jesus's question. Here in Acts, finally, Peter offers the solution: David never ascended into heaven (verse 34) but his descendant Jesus has been raised and exalted to

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[35] far away (see Isaiah 38:17; DCH) whereas διαφθορά has the slightly more direct meaning of destruction, corruption or something rotting (BDAG).

[35] Some commentators find an additional use of a psalm in Acts 2:30, where there is perhaps an echo of Psalm 131:11 LXX. However, here Peter's explanation that David knew God had sworn to him on oath a descendant on the throne is best seen as clarifying the meaning of the previously cited psalm based on well-known contours of David's life.

[36] See Hebrews 1:13. Similarly Matt 22:44 and Mark 12:36, which make the same point except they render the MT's הֲדֹם (footstool) as ὑποκάτω (under [your feet]) instead of the LXX's ὑποπόδιον (footstool [for your feet]). Longenecker also finds allusions to Psalm 110:1 in Mark 14:62, Acts 7:55, Romans 8:34, Eph 1:20, Col 3:1, 1 Peter 3:22, and Hebrews 1:2, 8:1, 10:12, and 12:2: Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 159.

the right hand of God (verse 32–33). Hence Jesus is the one figure who can be described both as "Lord" and "Christ" (verse 36).

Peter uses the psalm to parse the exaltation of Jesus in Christological terms. The argument relies on the identification of the speaker of Psalm 109 with David himself, which is a genre-based assumption invoked by the psalm's superscription in the canonical form ("Of David. A Psalm"). The use of the source text here is best seen as typological in structure, because the description of one historical figure (a representative Davidic king who is given victory by Yahweh[37]) is being used to interpret a later individual (Jesus Christ). Yet the relationship between type and anti-type established by Peter is notably asymmetrical, in that what is said of Jesus using this psalm goes far beyond what could have been said of the original historical figure. This is because the apostolic interpretation of the psalm brings out ambiguities in the psalm in order to exaggerate the vindication and exaltation of the son of David beyond what could have ever been applied to the original historical figure. God's right hand is taken literally, not as mere metaphor for power over the king's enemies.[38] Read this way, the new genre of the riddle emerges. The earlier Davidic kings become puzzling, prophetic shadows of the reality to come. This asymmetry explains why Jesus's riddle cannot be answered until after his death and resurrection.

6. *Acts 4*. Peter and John's healing a lame man and preaching in the temple complex earns them some opposition from the Sadducees, who arrest them and force them to appear before the religious leadership. Peter takes this as an opportunity to deliver a provocative sermon: this lame man was healed in the name of Jesus, "whom you crucified and whom God raised from

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[37] In the MT, unlike the LXX and Acts, the two Lords are clearly distinguished: the first "Lord" is יְהֹוָה (*Yahweh*, the covenantal name of God) and the second "my lord" is אֲדֹנִי (*adonai*, a superior).

[38] Marshall, "Acts," 542.

the dead." (Acts 4:10) This dramatic reversal of the death sentence they had handed down on Jesus is further illustrated by a quotation from Psalm 117:22 LXX:

> This one [Jesus] is
>
> the stone
>
> that was despised by you builders
>
> that has become the cornerstone. (Acts 4:11, my translation)

The hermeneutic driving this use of the psalm is typological, identifying the exaltation of the crucified Messiah Jesus as the epitome of the psalm's theme of divine reversal leading to victory. In its original context the psalm is only implicitly messianic, describing the salvation of faithful Israel, presumably through the efforts of a kingly figure. In its NT context this becomes explicitly Christological as the psalm is applied to "this one", Jesus.

7. *Acts 4:25–26*. After Peter and John are released without punishment, the Christians respond with a prayer that includes the words of Psalm 2:1–2.

> Why did the Gentiles rage,
>
> and the peoples plot in vain?
>
> The kings of the earth set themselves,
>
> and the rulers were gathered together,
>
> against the Lord and against his anointed. (My translation)

The quotation is verbatim and is introduced by the formula "You said through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David your servant." The appropriateness of the psalm to this occasion is highlighted in verse 27 by the observation that the Jewish leaders and Gentiles had indeed gathered together (συνήχθησαν) to conspire against the Lord's anointed (χριστοῦ). The twist here is that Israel's leaders themselves are involved in this conspiracy against the king,

and so the original synonymous parallelism of nations (ἔθνη) and peoples (λαοὶ) is untethered in order to refer to two different groups: the Gentiles, and the peoples of Israel (λαοῖς Ἰσραήλ).

Such an application of the psalm to the trial of Jesus assumes a typological correspondence between the Davidic king, and the Messiah Jesus. The description of God laughing at the assembling enemies of David can on this basis then be applied to the enemies who conspired against Jesus to bring about his execution. The precise circumstances of this conspiracy — that it involved cooperation between the Jewish leadership and Gentiles — can then be read back into the psalm, playing with the slightly different semantic ranges of nations (which often refers to Gentiles) and peoples (which in the singular often refers to Israel) to create new meaning. This new meaning is not arbitrary but assumes both a typological correspondence between David and Christ, and the historical horizon of the events leading up to the execution of the Christ.

8. *Acts 13:22*. Here we find a composite quotation, and a problem for my hypothesis. Here Paul makes a speech in Antioch in which he recounts the history of God's dealings with his ancestors, culminating in the savior Jesus.

> I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart. (My translation)

In 1 Samuel 13:14 Samuel announces to Saul that the Lord "will seek" (ζητήσει, LXX) or "has found" (בקש , MT) a man after his own heart to replace him. Yet here Acts uses "has found" (Εὗρον) where the LXX prefers "will seek." This could be simply an alternative translation from the MT, but is often explained as a composite quotation taking two words from Psalm 88:21 LXX, "I have found David."[39]

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[39] Marshall, "Acts," 583.

The connection between David and Jesus here is not typological, but simple ancestry: "From this man's descendants, as he promised, God brought to Israel the Savior, Jesus" (verse 23). The hermeneutical structure is straight promise and fulfilment — the promised savior, descended from David, has arrived. Neither the description of David as a man after God's own heart nor the replacement of the ungodly king with God's own choice is explicitly applied to Jesus as we might expect in a typological hermeneutic. If εὗρον Δαυιδ is indeed a two-word quotation from Psalm 88 then this is the only time in Acts that a psalm does not receive a clear typological treatment.

9. *Acts 13:33*. Paul continues his speech by explaining the resurrection of Jesus in terms of Psalm 2:7. The psalm is introduced with the citation formula "as it is written in the second psalm" (verse 33). The immediate context of this psalm is Paul's identification of Jesus's resurrection as the fulfilment of "the promise that was made to our ancestors" (verse 32). The resurrection is interpreted as a dramatic vindication of Jesus's sonship, providing God's people with the promised messiah on whom rests all the hopes of Israel. The hermeneutic is typological: the ascension of the Davidic king to the throne has reached its climax in the ascension of Jesus from the dead.

10. *Acts 13:35*. Our final psalm expands the Christological argument Paul has been making in the synagogue at Antioch. It is a verbatim quotation from Psalm 16:10 LXX. This psalm has been quoted already in Peter's sermon in chapter two: "you will not let your Holy One see decay." Paul's argument here is a condensed version of Peter's sermon. As I argued in relation to that chapter, it is best to see this as a typological hermeneutic, which escalates David's salvation from death into Jesus's salvation through death.

The results of this analysis are summarized in the table below. Nine times out of ten, the psalm is applied to Jesus through a typological lens to make a Christological point.

Typological and Christological readings are applied to Psalm 2 (twice), Psalm 68, Psalm 108, Psalm 109, and Psalm 117. The only exception to this pattern is in Acts 13:22 with the potential composite quotation including Psalm 88.

Passage	Speaker	Source text (LXX)	Citation formula	Differences from LXX	Hermeneutical method
Acts 1:16	Peter	Psalms 68:26 and 108:8	"Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas"	–	Typological Christological
Acts 1:20a	Peter	Psalm 68:26	"It has been written in the book of Psalms..."	Major	Typological Christological
Acts 1:20b	Peter	Psalm 108:8	"It is written in the book of Psalms..."	Minor	Typological Christological
Acts 2:25–28	Peter	Psalm 15:8–11	"David says concerning him…"	Minor	Typological Christological
Acts 2:34–35	Peter	Psalm 109:1	"David...himself says..."	–	Typological Christological
Acts 4:11	Peter	Psalm 117:22	–	Major	Typological Christological
Acts 4:25–26	Believers	Psalm 2:1–2	"You [God] spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David…"	–	Typological Christological
Acts 13:22	Paul	Composite quotation: 1 Samuel 13:14; Psalm 88:21?	"of whom [God] testified and said"	–	Promise and fulfilment
Acts 13:33	Paul	Psalm 2:7	"As it is written in the second Psalm"	–	Typological Christological

Acts 13:35	Paul	Psalm 16:10	"it is also stated elsewhere"	Minor	Typological Christological

IV. WHAT IS IT ABOUT A PSALM?

It seems that the genre of the source material does indeed vary the hermeneutical structure used to understand and apply that text. Apparently there is something distinctive about the genre of a psalm that invites the interpreter to recontextualize the source text at the moment of performance, in a way that is less appropriate for other genres.

It is worth considering why psalms should attract such different treatment to other types of text. Ben Witherington III suggests that a psalm's use of metaphor and its interest in universal themes — the way it speaks to the general human fears, hopes, dreams and prayers for divine help — lends itself to application in the present in ways that "go beyond, but not against, the original meaning of the poetry."[40] It is all the more natural for the early Christians to do this with psalms, he observes, because they are used to memorizing them and taking their words on their lips, whereas there is no evidence that Jews or Christians were singing other genres of scripture at church or synagogue.[41]

Similarly, Jamie Grant observes that the canonical arrangement of the psalms lends itself to such recontextualization, because, like much wisdom literature in the Bible, the psalter is placed outside the narrative frame of the histories.[42] Indeed, in the canonical book of Psalms there are fourteen superscriptions that identify the psalm with a point in the David story (for example, Psalm 51's association with Nathan's confronting of David of Bathsheba), but most

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[40] Witherington, *Psalms Old and New*, 324.

[41] Witherington, *Psalms Old and New,* 325.

[42] Grant, "Singing," 34.

of the psalms come to us with little historical context. Psalm 102, for instance, is simply announced as "a prayer of one afflicted." Whatever hints we might think we recover of their original *Sitz im Leben*, we are on the whole invited by the compilers of the canonical book of Psalms to approach their content in a much more immediate way. Historical notes are far outnumbered by performance directions: to the choirmaster (55 psalms), according to a particular tune (21 psalms), or with stringed instruments (7 psalms). The psalter anticipates, and even welcomes, an emphasis on the horizon of future performances.

The fact that these psalms are almost always recontextualized in Acts using a typological structure is natural given that the elevated language of a psalm lends itself so well to the escalation usually seen in a type/anti-type structure. The evocative language is preloaded with potential for going beyond the original referent. The typological structure is also fitting given the strong association between David and the psalm genre. Almost half of the canonical psalms (74) are ascribed in some way to David. Four of the citation formulas in Acts mention David by name, and indeed in Acts 4:25 David is identified with the voice of the psalm even though neither the LXX nor the MT includes a Davidic superscription for that particular psalm. So while the universal themes and inherently performative nature of the psalm genre widen the scope for legitimate recontextualization, the strong Davidic connotations of the genre provides a principle of control, anchoring that recontextualization in the structure of a typological connection between David and Jesus (and by extension, in Acts 1, between the enemies of David and the enemy who betrayed Jesus).

V. EXPLAINING THE DEVIATIONS FROM THE GREEK VERSIONS

These aspects of the psalm genre may help to explain one of the more troubling aspects of the use of the OT in Acts: the apparent differences between the cited texts and the Greek versions available to us. A feature of some, but not all, of the uses of psalms in Acts is the relative

freedom to change the text to suit circumstances. Often the changes are relatively small: a participle is replaced by an adjectival form of the same word (Acts 1:20, citing Psalm 68), a variant spelling appears with omega instead of omicron (Acts 2:25, citing Psalm 15:8), or the grammar of the quotation is reconfigured to suit the prevailing sentence, so that a relative clause becomes a participial construction (Acts 4:11, citing Psalm 117:22).

Yet in a couple of places the changes depart significantly from the meaning of the original. In Acts 1:20 the plural "their" of Psalm 68:26 becomes a singular "his", and the reference to "their tents" is dropped entirely, in order that the psalm can be made to apply to Judas. Acts 4:11 is the other major example. Peter and John's healing a lame man and preaching in the temple complex earns them some opposition from the Sadducees, who arrest them and force them to appear before the religious leadership. Peter takes this as an opportunity to deliver a provocative sermon: this lame man was healed in the name of Jesus, "whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead." (Acts 4:10) This dramatic reversal of the death sentence they had handed down on Jesus is then illustrated by a quotation from Psalm 117:22 LXX:

> This one [Jesus] is
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> the stone
>
> that was despised by you builders
>
> that has become the cornerstone. (Acts 4:11)

Apart from some minor grammatical changes noted above, Peter's quotation differs from the LXX in two more substantial ways. While Peter accuses them of "despising" the stone (ἐξουθενέω), the LXX uses the milder "reject" (ἀποδοκιμάζω) which is the more common translation of the MT's מאס. Peter also makes a significant addition to the text, clarifying beyond any doubt that it is "you" builders who have rejected Jesus by crucifying him.

These kinds of differences from the Greek versions are often explained in similar ways. Perhaps Luke's own Greek version differs from the LXX we have, or is consciously conforming to some well known extra-biblical tradition.[43] Perhaps Luke is "smoothing" the style.[44] Perhaps it reflects Luke's own idiosyncratic vocabulary.[45] However such explanations are not entirely satisfactory. This particular Psalm is used by Jesus himself (Matt 21:42, Mark 12:10, and Luke 20:17) and in Peter's own first letter (1 Peter 2:7, with an allusion in verse 4). In both cases the quotation is verbatim from the LXX — without the changes seen in Acts 4. The fact that Luke can correctly quote the LXX version in the first volume of his work (in Luke 20), but give a very different translation here in Acts, seems to work against the idea that the changes simply reflect the standard Greek version of his context, or his idiosyncratic vocabulary. Instead, these changes in Acts 4 seem to reflect a deliberately pointed over-translation, perhaps bringing to mind the end of Luke's Gospel when Herod and his soldiers "despised" Jesus (Luke 23:11), or the warning of Proverbs that fools "despise" wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). There is something about the event of Peter's performance — under arrest, on trial, a witness of the resurrection, filled with the Holy Spirit — which motivates an intensification of the psalm's language in order to move his listeners towards a response.

It is notable that these kinds of significant differences between the Greek of Acts and the LXX seem much more likely to happen when the source material is a psalm — the only

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[43] See, regarding Acts 1:20, Dennis R. MacDonald, "Luke's Use of Papias for Narrating the Death of Judas," in *Reading Acts Today: Essays in Honour of Loveday C. A. Alexander* (ed. Steve Walton, et al.; Library of New Testament Studies; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 54.

[44] Regarding Acts 1:20, see: Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 766.

[45] Regarding Acts 4:11: Marshall, "Acts," 551.

comparable example with a prophetic text is in Acts 7:42–43 with Amos 5:27.[46] The changes

to the psalms are not random, but always serve to heighten the immediacy of a psalm's

relevance to the event of interpretation. These changes are best seen, not as the result of some

unknown Greek version, but rather as deliberate hermeneutical moves that are encouraged by

the performative nature of the psalms, and controlled by the underlying typological

hermeneutic which presupposes the outline of Christ event. There is something about the

event of Peter's performance — under arrest, on trial, a witness of the resurrection, filled with

the Holy Spirit — which motivates an intensification of the psalm's language in order to

move his listeners towards a response. This is not at all to suggest that the apostles are

rewriting the Bible to suit their sermons; these are sermons where the scriptures are being

applied. Everyone knows what the original psalm says, and there is no deception. The

application to the present is controlled by the presupposition that Jesus is the Messiah

because God has raised him from the dead.

CONCLUSION

Biblical studies and Genre Theory have had an uneven history of cross-pollination. Form

Criticism has sometimes drawn on secular literary theories of genre.[47] The 1970s saw a brief

burst of interest in literary Genre Theory within biblical studies circles, much of it informed

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[46] Admittedly, the sample size within Acts is not massive; further studies of other books of the NT are required
to see if this pattern holds more broadly.

[47] For a detailed study of the development of Form Criticism and its interdisciplinary connections to secular
literary theory see Martin J. Buss, *The Changing Shape of Form Criticism: A Relational Approach* (Sheffield:
Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 161–210.

by Bakhtin and concerned with defining the gospel and apocalyptic genres.[48] The importance of genre (at least in theory, if not always in practice) has been recognized by some important evangelical and Catholic statements of doctrine.[49] Somewhat more rarely the direction has gone the other way, and secular theorists have drawn on biblical studies for inspiration — Jauss had great admiration for the sociological dimension of genre implicit in Form Criticism and thought scholars of medieval literature could learn from it.[50]

I am proposing that biblical studies would benefit from another closer look at secular Genre Theory, particularly in its new Historical Descriptive forms that I have described. When we factor in source genre, a pattern emerges in the use of OT texts in Acts. Nine times out of ten, if the NT speaker is using a psalm, then they will employ a clear typological hermeneutical structure in order to make a Christological point. Doing so reflects what a psalm is: a song, words sung in time and space, particularly in moments of great communal joy and lament. Prophecy genre texts are not applied typologically (with three possible exceptions), but usually in terms of a this-is-that fulfilment structure, or using anthropological, theological or ethical lenses. Narrative texts are almost always direct speech, tied closely to their original place in salvation history, and sometimes applied as part of a promise and fulfilment structure. Laws receive direct ethical application. In other words, modern genre theory is really quite ancient: for the first-century Christian readers of the OT, the genre of the source text determines the hermeneutical strategy they employ.

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[48] Gerhart, "Generic Competence in Biblical Hermeneutics."

[49] See, e.g., Article XIII and exposition of *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*.

[50] Jauss, *Reception*, 100–2.