

THE NAME OF JESUS IN LUKE-ACTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE GENTILE MISSION¹

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Abstract

Peter declares “There is no other name . . . by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12); yet later he says, “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (10:34–35a). Are there then those among the Gentiles who follow God without hearing the name of Jesus, or are all who have not heard the name lost? The question, often posed in “either/or” discourse terms, fails to understand the meaning and scope of the name of Jesus and the urgency of the mandate to proclaim the gospel to every person. God is able to reveal himself to whomever he wills; yet every culture and creature therein need Jesus in his fullness. This divine-human synergy can only be approached as a mystery, a paradox juxtaposing sovereignty and the missional mandate given to the church.

Introduction

“There is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved,” Peter tells the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem (Acts 4:12). But later, he says to the Gentile Cornelius, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34–35a). Are there then those among the Gentiles who follow God without hearing the name of Jesus, or are all who have not heard the name lost?

How Luke presents the name of Jesus throughout Luke-Acts—one-quarter of the New Testament—sheds light on the question of the state of the Gentiles who

have not heard the name. The name of Jesus is more than a mere moniker for the gospel message proclaimed, for it involves divine workings that are not solely dependent upon the witness of the church. It is a divine name that expresses divine presence and essence. Nevertheless, the urgent state of the masses of humanity compels the church to proclaim the name and message of Jesus all the more. How Luke understands “the name” provides a solution to the either/or impasse.

The name of Jesus figures prominently in the Acts of the Apostles, and its function has varied applications. Its meaning, however, is seated in the authority, power, and person of Jesus, the Christ, in both his humanity and his divinity. Like other humans, Jesus relies on the power and direction of the Holy Spirit, but he is more than a Spirit-empowered human being. His presence, emblematic in his name, is also a divine enabling. This name, will, and authority play an essential role in the gospel that is for all people. The name transcends the divide between those who have heard the name and accepted salvation through it and those who have never heard the name. The way the question has been posed suffers from a too narrow understanding of the power of the name of Jesus and the person behind it and a too broad and vague assessment of those who know nothing of him.

A second question arises: What is the significance of the name of Jesus in the mission of carrying the gospel to the nations? What does the authority of the name demand from them and their cultures? To use Niebuhr’s terms, what does the name of Jesus say of Christ “in culture,” and what does it say of Christ “against culture”?²

To understand what Luke means when he uses the name of Jesus, one must look at uses of the concept of name in contemporary Hellenistic literature, in the Old Testament, and in the rest of the New Testament, especially in Luke’s Gospel, which is the prequel to Acts. Most significant is the concept of the name of God.

Greek Use of the Concept of Name

An exhaustive analysis of *name* in the Greek literature will not be offered here, but concepts and uses that shed light on Luke’s understanding of “the name of Jesus” will be considered. The name was a constituent part of a person.³ The Greek word for *name* (*onoma*) could mean “to have a reputation,” because to know a name was to know the person.⁴ It could also refer to the rights and obligations of an individual in a contract.⁵ The practice of using the name of a god, spirit, or demon in magic stretched far back in antiquity and persisted in the era contemporary with the early church.⁶ Names had a binding or controlling quality on a spirit or god, obligating or forcing it to do what the petitioner wanted. The name made the

signified spirit/divinity and its power accessible to humans. Magic, though prohibited by Roman law,⁷ was pervasive in the Empire.⁸ As Luke describes in Acts 19:13–20, practitioners readily used names from various cults and religions. Magicians often relied on foreign names (*onomata barbarika*) and readily used the Jewish and Christian *nomina sacra*.⁹ Luke makes a clear distinction between Hellenistic magic and supernatural activity in Christianity.

The Concept of Name in the Old Testament

The primary Hebrew word for *name* is *šm*, usually translated as *onoma* in the Septuagintal Greek. It implies ownership; the giving of a name “establishes a relation of dominion and possession” towards the one receiving the name. For example, God the Creator “determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names” (Ps 147:4).¹⁰ Similarly, God says to his people, “He who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isa 43:1). Adam in his exercise of delegated dominion gives names to the animals (Gen 2:19).

In the Ancient Near East, the names of gods were used to leverage favor or control of the deity; however, the God of the Hebrews does not give his name to be manipulated and answers such demands with “Why is it that you ask my name?” (Gen 32:30; Judg 13:17–18). Manoah’s request of the name receives the added answer, “It is too wonderful.” Even when Moses asks for God’s name, the response is elusive (*Yhwh*), referring to God’s undeniable presence in the wake of astounding, fearful miracles. Clearly, God is in charge. Though God does give a name for himself, the power resides with him. He reveals himself in his miraculous intervention (Gen 17:1; Exod 3:14; 6:2). Clearly, the initiative and prerogative lie with God; it is he who gives his name in revelation (Exod 6:1–2). “Thus the name of Yahweh is not an instrument of magic; it is a gift of revelation.”¹¹ In revealing his name, he reveals himself, his will, and his power; he does not self-identify to allow humans to control him.

“The name” is often qualified by “holy” (*qdš*). By inference, the holiness refers to separateness, that is, not being profane.¹² “His holy name” is used in the context of worship, in parallel with the name, *yhwh*, as reverential deference to the Tetragrammaton (e.g., 1 Chron 16:35; Ps 145:21). Profaning the name involves improper behavior and disobedience; the goal of this sacralizing is reciprocal: “You shall keep my commandments and observe them: I am the LORD. You shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel: I am

the LORD; I sanctify you” (Lev 22.31). The holiness does not lie in utter separation between God and his people but in their covenant relationship.¹³ To use God’s name implies a covenant relationship by which the user honors God’s sovereignty and will. It follows that false prophets and diviners who used God’s name in magical ways or swore falsely by the name of the Lord for gain would be condemned (Ezek 13:1–16, esp. vv. 6, 9). One dare not speak in the name of the Lord something contrary to God’s will.¹⁴ God gives his name to the Hebrews, a name that simultaneously gives access to his aid and requires accountability to his will. This name is based on his ultimate beingness, which cannot be vitiated by human will.

God’s name signifies God’s presence and is similar to the concept of his “face” (*pānīm*), the presence of God (*penē yhw̄b*), God present in person (e.g., Jer 10:6; Mal 1:11; Ps 54:8; Prov 18:10). The name and the face of the Lord appear together; to profane the name of God in ritual is to risk being cut off from the Lord’s presence, *pāni* (Lev 22:2–3). In even stronger language, the name and face appear in a prohibition of infant sacrifice: “I myself will set my face [*pāni*] against them, and will cut them off from the people, because they have given of their offspring to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name [*šēm qādēšī*]” (Lev 20:1–3).

The holy name is often paired with the glory and might of God (e.g., Isa 12:4; Zech 14:9; Ps 8:1–9; 20:1–9). God’s manifold power is evident in his name: “Our Redeemer—the LORD of hosts is his name—is the Holy One of Israel” (Isa 47:4). He is the Lord of armies, (*šēbā’ôt*, see also Isa 48:2; 54:5) “The name of God,” then, should be interpreted as “the God gloriously manifest in history and creation.”¹⁵

The name sometimes appears somewhat distinct from God, approaching something akin to a distinct presence since God builds a temple to house his *šm* (2 Sam 7:13; 1 Kings 3:2; 8:17). According to Schmidt, “The presence of the *šm* in the temple denotes it terminologically distinctive from the proximity of God from the standpoint of salvation history. The *šm* guarantees God’s presence in the temple in clear distinction from Yahweh’s throne in heaven.”¹⁶ The name speaks of God’s immanent presence.

The name of God is so close to “the hypostatization of the *šm* standing over against Yahweh in greater independence,” it is as though God and his name have become two distinct things.¹⁷ This distinctness of the name connotes the immanence of God. Yet Besnard cautions, “It is vain for us to ask if we are in the presence of ‘*Deus revelatus*’ or ‘*Deus absconditus*.’ We are before a divine dialectic

more profound than this alternative.” When God *reveals* his name in theophany, one must acknowledge the noetic nature of the intervention. “[O]ne must do justice to the *mystery* with which God always surrounds his theophanies” (italics mine).¹⁸ The name and the revelation of the same are mysteries revealed but not mysteries completely comprehended; his sovereignty is always intact.

The name is God present replete with his power. For example, the revelation of the name to Moses at Horeb not only presents the inscrutable mystery of the name, but also the presence of God’s power in the miracles of the burning bush, the rod turned into a snake, and the leprous hand healed (Exod 3:1–4:7). In this theophany, the angel of God (*ml’k yhw’h*), God, and the name of God are all present (3:2, 4, 13–14). The name works like the “hand of God,” in that it creates, works miracles, defends, and destroys (e.g. Exod 6:1; 9:15; 15:3; 1 Sam 5:6, 7, 9, 11; Ps 78:42; Isa 41:20). Often the hand of the Lord and his name appear together: “The Lord is a warrior; The Lord is his name . . . Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power—your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy” (Exod 15:3, 6). In Exodus 9:15–16, hand, name, and power are linked together as the means of the Hebrews’ deliverance and the destruction of Pharaoh’s lands and people. His name, *yhw’h*, refers not only to his existence but also to his actions.¹⁹ Often the arm of God and his hand are mentioned together as the powerful agent of both creation and destruction, with the latter bringing simultaneously judgment and salvation (e.g., arm: Exod 6:6; Ps 136:12; Jer 27:5; Isa 30:30; 59:9; hand: Isa 48:13; Exod 7:4; 9:3; 1 Sam 5:6, 11; Ps 145:16; Isa 51:16).

The Name of God/The Lord in Luke-Acts

The title Lord (*kyrios*), which occurs 205 times in Luke-Acts, almost always refers to God or Jesus.²⁰ Luke follows in the OT understanding of the name of God. In the *Magnificat*, Mary’s hymn in response to the Annunciation, she repeats the worshipful phrase, “holy is his name,” which is frequently found in praise to God in the OT (Luke 1:49). Mary is praising the God of Israel. The context provided in Mary’s hymn (1:46–53) reflects the aspects associated with the “name of the Lord” in the OT. She calls God “Lord” (*kyrion*) in verse 46, “God, the savior” (v. 47), and the mighty One (*ho dynatos*, v. 49). In verse 50, Mary proclaims that the Holy One is merciful yet to be approached with reverential fear, leaving no room for presumption. God reveals his strength in his arm (*kratos en brachioni autou*, v. 51) to judge the haughty and powerful, raise the humble, and mercifully provide help for the needy (vv. 52–53). In the *Magnificat*, “the Powerful One” (*ho dynatos*) does

great things for Mary. “Holy is his name” (*kai hagion to onoma autou*) means that God’s name is unique and powerful and accomplishes his will. Mary describes God’s program of salvation, which is the will of God inherent in the name of the Lord, as resulting in a miraculous deliverance and great reversal, shaking the foundations of the world order.

Luke uses similar language in his version of the Lord’s Prayer (11:2–4). The name of the Father is hallowed (*hagiasthētō to onoma sou*). Here the parallelism shows how to hallow the name of God: to call for and work for the coming of God’s kingdom. His sovereignty must be acknowledged. Matthew’s version equates “hallowed be thy name” with “thy will be done” (Matt 10:6b). One cannot presume to invoke the name of the Lord apart from carrying out his program and agenda (similarly with God’s will, Luke 22:14).

The next use of the name of God in Luke occurs in 13:31–35 in the context of Jesus’ prophecy that Jerusalem would reject him and that he would die there: “I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord’” (13:35). Jesus says it to the Pharisees. His words have an eschatological ring of judgment.

In the previous context Jesus answers the question as to whether many or few will be saved by indicating the latter (13:23–24). At his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, we hear again the refrain, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord” (19:38). But the adulation is short-lived, for after being rejected by many, Jesus will die, and the destruction of the city will follow in a few decades. For Luke, for Jesus to “come in the name of the Lord” means that he is the acknowledged agent of God, particularly at the Triumphal Entry, as the messianic king as per Matthew, Mark, and John (21:9; 11:9–10; 12:13, respectively). Luke notes that the people acclaim, “Peace (*eirēnē*) in heaven and glory in the highest,” the latter, a *passivum divinum*, the former reflecting the meaning inherent in the Hebrew, *šālôm* of “completeness.” The divine will and plan begin their completion with the arrival of King Jesus into Jerusalem: “As Jesus enters the city he presents himself as the king who brings the nation’s eschatological hope.”²¹ In Luke his message and miracles are also affirmed “in the name of the Lord,” for of the Gospel writers only Luke says that “the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen” (19:37b). His works confirm his words (5:24).

A Calculated Ambiguity

“And it shall be that all who should call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).²² Here, in Luke’s account of Pentecost, Peter is quoting from Joel (2:28–32) who relates that God will pour out his Spirit on “all flesh” in the midst of an eschatological apocalypse, culminating in salvation (Acts 2:17–21). On the face of it, Peter’s audience would understand “the name of the Lord” (*onoma kyriou*) as referring to God. Here God promises to pour out his Spirit, even as he did upon Jesus (Luke 3:21–22; 4:1, 14, 18; Acts 10:38). Here God empowers, enlightens, and saves.²³ As Peter concludes his Pentecost sermon, he refers to the name of Jesus: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (2:38). Between verses 21 and 38 Luke quotes from Psalm 110:1, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” So, in effect, there are two “Lords.” Next, Peter identifies Jesus as the one whom God has made “both Lord and Messiah” (2:35), who is also the dispenser of the Holy Spirit (v. 34). Between verses 21 and 38 Luke creates a calculated ambiguity between the name of God and the name of Jesus. This subtle shift makes a crucial point: the prerogatives of God the Lord are the prerogatives of Jesus the Lord; they are the same. Larry Hurtado does think the “Lord” refers to Jesus: “[T]he exalted Jesus is identified as (or associated with) the ‘Lord’ in places in the biblical texts where God (Heb. *Yahweh*) was the original referent (vv. 20–21, 25)”²⁴; but he does so cautiously.²⁵

In the first account of Paul’s conversion in Acts, Luke emphasizes Jesus and his name and his title as Lord (9:5, 13–17, 27). On the road to Damascus, when overcome by intense light, Paul asks, “Who are you, Lord?” and receives the response, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (v. 5). Ananias relates to Paul that *Jesus* sent him to pray for Paul’s healing and infilling with the Holy Spirit (v. 17). But the interaction between Ananias and the Lord before he visits the afflicted Paul resembles the structure of an Old Testament theophany. The Lord approaches Ananias in a vision calling his name, and Ananias answers, “Here I am, Lord” (v. 10). This vision and Ananias’s response are reminiscent of Samuel’s encounter with God as well as those of Abraham, Moses, and Isaiah (2 Sam 3:4–8; Gen 22:11; Exod 3:4; Isa 6:8). “Here I am” is the appropriate response to a divine visitation. Saul had set out to eliminate in Damascus those “calling upon the name of Jesus” (v. 14). But the words that Ananias hears next sound like divine language: “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before the Gentiles, and

kings and before the people of Israel.” Here the wording is similar to Jeremiah’s calling: “I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5). Eventually Luke lets his readers know that it is Jesus who appears to Ananias as “Lord” when he visits Paul later (v. 17). Again, the line between God and Jesus is not so clear.

The pattern of ambiguity continues in the account of Peter’s precedential visit to Cornelius, a devout Gentile who feared God and “prayed constantly to God” (10:1–2). In a vision, an “angel of the Lord” appears to Cornelius. *Angleon tou theou* is theophanic language, and Cornelius addresses the celestial visitor as “Lord.” While the visitor does refer to God in the third person in calling Cornelius’ prayers and alms a “memorial before God,” the visitation still has the markings of theophany even though the visitor is called a holy angel (v. 22), and could be seen as weakening a theophanic interpretation.

The following day, Peter sees the vision in which he addresses the voice from heaven as “Lord” (v. 14). The voice responds, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane” (see also 11:7–9). This does sound as though a personage other than God is addressing Peter, but when he relates the event to Cornelius the next day, he says, “God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean” (v. 28a; see also v. 34). With the Spirit directing Peter to go with Cornelius’ messengers (v. 19) and Peter calling Jesus “Lord of all” (v. 36), the delineation between Jesus and God remains unclear.

Later, at the Jerusalem Council, James says, “Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name” (15:4). Here James is describing the message to Peter as coming from God and for the sake of his name; next he cites Amos 9:11–12 and Jeremiah 12:15 as evidence for the inclusion of non-Jews: “so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called” (15:17). Yet these Gentiles were “baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (10:48). Luke does not always clearly delineate the roles and identities of Jesus and *Yahweh* not by error but by design. Jason Staples has identified the double use of “Lord, Lord” (“*Kyrie, Kyrie*”) as specifically addressing *Yahweh*.²⁶ For Luke, Jesus’ identity is inextricably bound up in God’s. This will be especially significant when we answer the questions we initially raised.

Nomina Sacra

Jesus’ name was treated as divine even in the earliest parts of the New Testament, notably the early Pauline letters, which, by most accounts, predate Luke and Acts.²⁷

Jesus' divinity, even his heavenly pre-existence, appears to be accepted among Christians thirty years after his Ascension, well within living memory of Jesus. Luke presents a similar Christology, which suggests that his work was produced close to the time of Paul or later, yet still faithfully represented the primitive expressions of the church.

In the earliest extant manuscripts of the New Testament (second to fourth century) the scribes appear to honor this early high-Christology in the use of *nomina sacra* or "sacred names." They frequently abbreviate God (*Theos*) as *ThS*, Lord (*Kyrios*) as *KS*, Christ (*Christos*) as *XS*, and Jesus (*Iēsous*) as *IS*, which were the earliest attested *nomina sacra* among the texts,²⁸ some of which can be dated to AD 200 or earlier.²⁹ These abbreviated forms consist usually of the first and last letter with a line over the top. Some of the earliest artifacts of Christianity, these texts show what appears to be a deferential reverence for these words. Eleven other abbreviated words later appear in the texts, but the four named earlier appear early and with greater frequency.³⁰ Most relate in some way to Jesus.

Schuyler Brown identifies the first four not only as *nomina sacra*, but more specifically as *nomina divina*, names for divinity.³¹ This Christian deference for sacred names is similar to the avoidance of the Tetragrammaton in Jewish scribal practice and in ritual reading and may be the inspiration for the Christian reverence of the name; however, the *nomina sacra* also appear to have come from an earlier practice of revering the name of Jesus because of its close association with the name of God.

Jason Staples notes that the doubled vocative "Lord, Lord" (*Kyrie, Kyrie*) corresponds to *Yahweh, Yahweh* in the Old Testament (e.g. Ps 109:21[LXX 108:21]; Ezek 37:21; Deut 3:24 of eighty-four times in LXX). The expression appears as *Kyrie, Kyrie* in the Septuagint and is addressed to God. The three times "*Kyrie, Kyrie*" appears in the Gospels (Matt 7:21–22; 25:11; and Luke 6:46) it is addressed to *Jesus*.³² This doubling of the vocative is not merely emotive address or "a rudimentary 'sir.'"³³ Rather the Matthean texts present Jesus as the eschatological Lord and Judge.³⁴

In Luke 6:47 Jesus asks, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?" Here the stress is on obedience rather than judgment, which is more remotely placed in the following parable of the houses built on rock or sand where safety or ruin is a result of obedience (6:47–49).

The Lukan construction of the saying also makes it even clearer than the Matthean examples that the doubling of κύριε does not signal

pathos. . . . Instead, Luke 6.46 uses καλέω with direct object and complement (the vocative taking the place of the usual accusative complement), which is a construction for addressing or designating a person by a title or name. . . . Coupled with the fact that in the Lukan version Jesus demands the obedience one would expect to be directed towards God (contrast Matt 7.21–2), Luke’s treatment of κύριε κύριε as a specific form of address . . . [is] best understood as an application of the divine name to Jesus.³⁵

According to Staples, Matthew and Luke use the double *Kyrie* “to represent the Name of YHWH in the Greek texts,” and readers of the Septuagint would recognize the expression as such. “Such applications of the name to the exalted Jesus amount to calling him God, a figure to be obeyed and worshipped alongside God the father.”³⁶ Matthew and Luke clearly understand that Jesus himself uses the emphatic “Lord, Lord” to refer to himself.

The Name of Jesus in Luke-Acts

Having looked at the frequent overlapping of the name of God and the name of Jesus, we will now look at the name of Jesus on its own, which will shed much light on our original questions of who is saved and what demands are made of the Gentile convert. In the Gospel, the angel announces the heaven-given name of Mary’s child, who will also be called great as well as Son of the Highest, and to whom the Lord will give an eternal throne of David (1:31–33; see also 2:21).³⁷ Later Elizabeth addresses Mary as “the mother of my Lord” (1:43); again, we see Lord used for God when Jesus is in proximity. Then, in 9:48, Jesus teaches that if his followers receive a child in his name, they receive him and God. Here power and authority are cloaked in merciful humility. Again, to act in Jesus’ name is to act in God’s name and will.

When the seventy (-two) disciples return, they address Jesus as “Lord” (*Kyrie*), rejoicing that the demons are subject to them through Jesus’ name (10:17; see also 9:49–50). Jesus’ authority and power are extended to others, but he warns against being enamored by power at the expense of one’s soul. The name of Jesus reflects the will of Jesus. His power cannot be co-opted. This anticipates Jesus’ later warning against imposters who will mislead by presuming upon his name (21:18).

In Luke’s Gospel, the name of Jesus calls for repentance and effects forgiveness of sins (24:47). John’s baptism accomplished this as well (3:3 with Mark 1:4); but

Jesus' baptism also cleanses and empowers through the Holy Spirit (3:16–18; Acts 1:5, 8).³⁸ In Acts, baptism in the name of Jesus stands in contrast to John's and other washings in Judaism. At the beginning of Acts, Jesus himself links baptism with the action of the Holy Spirit and inspired witness (1:5–8). This baptism, initially in Acts, is not simply an occasion of washing in water. Presumably, the disciples had already experienced water baptism at the hands of Jesus and/or the early disciples (John 3:22, 26). This new baptism, or infilling of the Holy Spirit, resulted in the xenoglossic witness on the day of Pentecost (2:4–11); however, in his following sermon Peter juxtaposes the water baptism in the name of Jesus with the reception of the Holy Spirit: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you in (*epi*) the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38). Since Jesus is the baptizer in the Holy Spirit (2:33), it was necessary to baptize the disciples of John in Ephesus "in (*eis*) the name of the Lord Jesus" to receive the Holy Spirit as those at Pentecost had (19:5–6). For the Samaritans, there is a longer time between water baptism and Spirit reception (19:14–17).

The prepositions Luke uses in the baptismal formulae, "because of" (*epi*), "into" (*eis*), "in" (*en*), and "upon," do seem interchangeable;³⁹ yet the different expressions shed light on the significance of baptism. Ziesler suggests that the use of *epi* could refer to the authority of Jesus in the formula in 2:38.⁴⁰ Heitmüller notes that "*eis* [into] the name of" was used in the papyri as a banking term for crediting funds to the account of someone.⁴¹ Thus, the baptizand becomes the property of Jesus.

Others suggest that the expression originates from the Hebrew *lšm*, meaning "into the name of someone" or "in behalf of someone," or as an offering to the "Name," as suggested in the Mishnah (*m. Zeb* 4.6), thus giving it a cultic nuance.⁴² In Acts, the apostles baptize in the name of Jesus, Jesus Christ, or the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; see also Pauline practice, Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 1:13; Gal 3:27). For Jews, the confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, would be significant, for when Peter calls for his *Jewish* audience to repent and be baptized, he uses the formula "in the name of Jesus Christ" (2:38).⁴³ But ultimately "Lord Jesus" is the fundamental referent,⁴⁴ for the Jews it acknowledges the authority of *Yahweh* invested in the risen, ascended Jesus. The overlap between the name of the Lord and that of "Lord Jesus" made this confession crucial, for the Gentiles confessing Jesus as "Lord" would require a major paradigm shift, as we shall see (9:15).

While there is some reason to consider baptism "in the name of Jesus," or similar variations, as the most ancient, the tripartite baptismal formula—"in the

name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”—appears to have an early pedigree as well (Matt 28:19). The Didache, or *The Teaching of the Lord to the Nations by the Twelve Apostles*, calls for baptism “into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit” (7:1, 3).⁴⁵ The traditions behind the Didache date back as far as AD 50–70. Early canonical benediction and other formulations have references to “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” together (2 Cor 13:13; 1 Cor 12:4–7; 2 Thess 2:13–14). Thus, such triadic groupings had widespread use in the early church. Furthermore, the Didache equates the preferred baptism be done according to the triune formula rather than simply “in the name of the Lord” (comp. 7:1–3 with 9:5). Opinion is divided as to whether “in the name of the Lord” refers to God or to Jesus in 9:5. Since Lord may refer to either God or Jesus in the Didache, and sometimes it is not clear which is intended, Lord may refer either to God the Father⁴⁶ or to Jesus (4:1; 8:2; 9:5; 10:5; 11:2, 8; 14:1, 3; 16:1). That “in the name of the Lord” does refer to Jesus in some cases demonstrates that the early Christian community, reflected in the Didache, considered both types of baptismal formulae to be referring to the same God.⁴⁷

Converts, i.e., those baptized, repent, and in renouncing much of the world order embrace a new lifestyle. Forgiveness now comes through *this* name (10:43), the name they call upon at their baptism (22:16). They go into the water as individuals, but come up as members of a community with a new allegiance, a new family in submission to the teaching of the apostles (2:42–47). Invoking the name brings the convert into a covenant with the Lord in his kingdom, and this confession sets the repentant apart from old allegiances (15:14).

The Name of Jesus and Miracles

The name of Jesus is the primary agent for miracles in Acts (3:6–10, 16; 4:7, 10, 30; 16:8; 19:11–20; also, Luke 10:17–18). In Acts, the Holy Spirit also effects miracles. For example, at Pentecost the Holy Spirit manifests the sound of a great wind (*phoēs*),⁴⁸ fiery tongues, and the miraculous glossolalia (Acts 2:1–4). The Spirit kills Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11).⁴⁹ The Spirit also directs the mission, but Luke focuses on the role of the Spirit in inspired witness.⁵⁰ While Jesus delegates the authority, he is the causative agent in all healings and miracles.⁵¹ Luke stresses the lordship of Jesus, for Jesus bestows the Holy Spirit. The name cannot be used apart from submission to his lordship, for the name is not a mere lever of magic to be manipulated by anyone. The sons of Sceva attempt to use the sacred name as a mere lever of magic with disastrous results. The demons acknowledge the

Person of the name. As a result, many come to believe in Jesus, publicly confessing and disclosing their magic practices, rendering them ineffective. Magic books are burned, and the name of the Lord Jesus is praised (19:11–20). Jesus the Lord can have no rivals. Further, to accept the name of Jesus is to accept his teachings (4:12, 18; 5:28, 40–41).⁵²

The Name of Jesus and the Gentile Mission

Salvation apart from the name? Having examined Luke’s understanding of Jesus’ name, we can now address our initial questions, the first being, “Must all hear the name of Jesus and his message to be saved, or are there godly folk in systems devoid of Christian evangelization?” Frequently, one hears the argument that all religions and worldviews are equally valid and good, and salvation is available in any of them. Do Peter’s words to Cornelius support this: “In every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34–35a)? Cannot God speak to non-Christians in their own systems? Is not the good in other religions from God (Jas 1:17)? Do Christian missionaries risk introducing bad principles and practices from their own culture into another society?

Bruce Olson, apostle to the Motilone (Bari) people of Venezuela and Columbia, entered a culture that internally did not have many of the problems inherent in Western culture. He wondered what the gospel had to offer them and whether his presence would corrupt them. One day a tribe member said he heard the “voice of the tiger” saying that evil spirits would come and take some of their lives. It was then that Olson knew that they needed to be delivered from fear and that the message of Jesus would protect them.⁵³ God gave Olson the wisdom to use Motilone structures and beliefs to communicate his good news. Apparently, every person and every people group need what Jesus has to offer. The Jerusalem Council, too, came to realize that the gospel was transcultural although some tenets and practices were non-negotiable (Acts 15). Furthermore, according to James, God “looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take *from among them* a people for his name” (Acts 15:14, emphasis mine). God does not intend to leave the Gentiles in their former state.

Nowhere is there a “No Trespassing” sign that applies to God; he can and does invade all domains. Such is the nature of sovereignty. Mark Wilson relates an account of his conversion that started in the middle of a Native American peyote cult service:

[The leader] began to sing a peyote song in Lakota Sioux, “Wakantanka, waonsila yo; Wanikiya, waonsila yo,” which means, “God, have mercy on me; Jesus, have mercy on me.” Suddenly I heard another inner voice, which I would later identify as the Holy Spirit, also speaking to me, “But *I have* had mercy on you through the death of my son Jesus Christ.” I was stunned by this revelation because I had thought the peyote church was the ultimate means to spiritual peace and joy. But doubts had emerged in recent months that had shaken that idea. I now realized that there was no salvation through eating peyote and this so-called sacrament would not lead me to faith and eternal life.

With the conclusion of morning water and the resumption of the service, I stepped outside the church house and looked up into the clear, star-lit sky. “High” on peyote and without any altar call or organ playing “Just As I Am,” I thanked God for his mercy on me through Jesus’ death. I also told the Lord that I would follow him no matter where that path might lead.⁵⁴

There are numerous accounts of Christophanies to non-Christians prior to significant exposure to the Christian message. Such visitations are mentioned in Acts. God can meet anybody on any path, but he meets them only to redirect them to the Way. The Lukan description of the name of Jesus is not limited to the lips of missionaries. Given the deliberate overlap of the authority in the name of God and in the name of the Lord Jesus, no one receives such an encounter apart from the name of Jesus, for he is the cosmic Lord. He proclaims his own name (Acts 9:5). The encounter with the divine is never apart from Jesus. The name is never apart from any divine act, for such acts always carry the authority, compassion, and presence of the name of Jesus the Lord.

What is the state of those who have never heard the gospel message? Are they doomed to eternal loss? God is just, but he is also merciful. In a conversation with I. Howard Marshall, he suggested that these cases be put on “God’s suspense account.”⁵⁵ As the Eastern Church says, “We know where the Church is, but we cannot be sure where it is not.”⁵⁶ Some talk of the possibility of the “noble pagan” being spared hell and either being admitted to heaven or relegated to Dante’s limbo: “After those who refused choice come those without opportunity of choice. They could not, that is, choose Christ; they could, and did, choose human virtue, and for that they have their reward.”⁵⁷

But rather than speak of a hypothetical possibility, the probability is more pressing, one of eternal loss. All need something from Jesus. According to Luke, Jesus himself has mandated that his message of salvation be proclaimed to “all nations” through Christian witnesses (Luke 24:46–48).⁵⁸

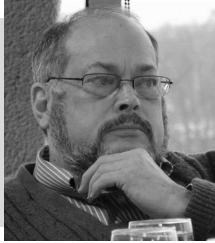
The second question asks, “What does the name of the Lord Jesus in Luke-Acts say about the mission to the Gentiles?” First, the gospel transcends cultures, and the church is cosmopolitan in composition; yet Christ in Gentile cultures affirms, leavens, sanctifies, prohibits, and transforms. The incarnation of Jesus demands simultaneously a yes and a no from every tribe and culture. For the Gentile to call upon the Lord Jesus at baptism is to embrace his lordship and become his servant. To be baptized in his name is to become the property of Jesus and to offer oneself as a sacrificial offering acceptable to God.

Calling Jesus Lord in the world of Caesar was a counter-cultural act, potentially deemed to be treason. To pray for God’s kingdom to come sometimes meant saying “no” not only to the petty fiefdom of self but to the empire: “One must obey God more than man” (Acts 5:29). Christians prayed the Lord’s Prayer three times a day: “Thy kingdom come” (Did 8:2–3). This, in Roman eyes, was a daily dethronement of their divine emperor and a declaration of allegiance to a foreign king. They could pray for the emperor but not to the emperor; blind obedience was not an option.

The Gentiles witnessed miraculous power through the name of Jesus that convinced them of the truth. In the sons of Sceva incident, they saw a power that trumped all other supernatural forces. Attempts to manipulate God’s power ultimately ended in disaster; with the power came a unilateral, non-negotiable sovereignty. One could not participate in God’s power while bargaining for favors from lesser spirits; accordingly, the Ephesians burned their magic books (19:19). The Gentile convert adopted a new counter-cultural cosmography, “Jesus is Lord of all” (10:36). No longer were religion and spirituality manipulation of the deities but now a realm of ethics in submission to the ultimately good Sovereign who is to be obeyed, not manipulated. This God is not a mere demon with which to curse one’s neighbors, for even the evil spirits acknowledge the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus (19:13–17; Luke 4:33–36, 40).

The good news to the Gentile is once again offered in our day. Jesus offers release from the spirits of materialism, spirits that vainly promise to fill the longings of the human spirit with physical things. The Lord of life forbids the death of the unborn as much as *Yahweh* forbade the sacrifice of infants to grim idols for convenience, success, and prosperity (Lev 18:21; Deut 12:30–31; 18:10; see also

Did 2:2). He calls for compassion on the destitute. He demands an allegiance that leaves no room for blind obedience to any world government. Again, Jesus offers to exorcize the *mal du siècle*—the spirits of post-modernity—if we but bow the knee and say yes to his yes for our life and no to what would destroy it. The West, which once claimed to be the center of Christendom, has essentially become Gentile once more; only the Lord Jesus can save it: hallowed be the name.



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Notes

¹ An earlier version of this study was published in *Proclaiming Christ in the Power of the Holy Spirit: Opportunities and Challenges*, eds. Wonsuk Ma, Emmanuel Anim, and Rebekah Bled (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, 2020), 11–30.

² H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996).

³ Hans Bietenhard, “ὄνομα,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 5:243.

⁴ Bietenhard, “ὄνομα,” 5:244.

⁵ Bietenhard, “ὄνομα,” 5:249.

⁶ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 571.

⁷ For Roman actions against magic and the like, see Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. Franklin Philip (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 1997), 236n.9.

⁸ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* XXVIII, 19; Tacitus, *Annals* II, 69; IV, 22, 52; XII, 65; XVI, 31.

⁹ Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 201–2.

¹⁰ All biblical citations are from NRSV unless otherwise noted.

¹¹ Bietenhard, “ὄνομα,” 5:255.

¹² H. -P. Müller, “שׁדַּי/qdš,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, eds. E. Jenni and C. Westermann, trans. M. Biddle (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1979), 3:1104.

¹³ Müller objects to the notion that God is “wholly other” as proposed by Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. J. W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), 25–30. “[T]he experience of the holy as the ‘wholly other’ presupposes, for the most part, a point of

departure in an understanding of the profane that has been suggested only by the absence of the numinous in modern concepts of normalcy” (1104).

¹⁴ Note the primordial account of Balaam’s attempt to pronounce a curse contrary to the will of the Lord (Num 22–24).

¹⁵ S. van der Woude, “𐤁𐤍/šēm,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 3:1366–7.

¹⁶ M. Schmidt, *Prophet und Tempel. Eine Studie zum Problem der Gottensähe im Alten Testament* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1948), 93. Cited in Bietenhard, “ὄνομα,” 5:256.

¹⁷ Friedrich Giesebrecht, *Die Alttestamentliche Schätzung des Gottesnamens und ihre religionsgeschichtliche Grundlage* (Königsberg: Thomas & Oppermann, 1901), 123–26. Summarized in Bietenhard, “ὄνομα,” 5:257.

¹⁸ Albert Marie Besnard, *Le Mystère du Nom* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1962), 37. Translation mine.

¹⁹ Anne Marie Kitz, “The Verb *yahway,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138:1 (2019), 39–62. “[The] aspectual meanings of the two verbal forms yields insight into the divine character behind the name YHVH.”

²⁰ There are 202 and 203 uses in the Gospel and Acts, respectively, out of 719 uses in the New Testament.

²¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1559.

²² Translation mine.

²³ Keener, among others, assumes that Peter takes “the name of the Lord to be referring to Jesus, especially in light of 2:38.” Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 1:920–922 and n.643. Verse 22 starts a distinct section of the speech and is Christological in focus. See Donald Juel, “The Social Dimensions of Exegesis,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981), 443–56, esp. 444–5; and Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic* (London: SCM, 1961), 36–48.

²⁴ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 181.

²⁵ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 181n.44.

²⁶ Staples, “‘Lord, Lord’: Jesus as YHWH in Matthew and Luke,” *New Testament Studies* 64 (2018), 1–19.

²⁷ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 98–153.

²⁸ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 626.

²⁹ In the fragment, Rylands Library, P52, dated as early c. 125, there is reason to believe that the original, whole manuscript contained *nomina sacra*; see Charles E. Hill, “Did the Scribe of P52 Use the *Nomina Sacra*? Another Look,” *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002), 587–92.

³⁰ Larry Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 2–4.

³¹ Schuyler Brown, “Concerning the Origin of the *Nomina Sacra*,” *Studia Papyrologica* 9 (1970), 19.

³² Staples, “‘Lord, Lord,’” 1–19.

³³ Staples, “‘Lord, Lord,’” 15.

³⁴ Some manuscripts have “*Kyrie, Kyrie*” in an eschatological context in Luke 13:25 such as A, D, W, θ , and the Majority Text; while B^75 , \aleph , B, L have the single *Kyrie*, which N-A/28 and USB/5 follow.

³⁵ Staples, ““Lord, Lord,”” 18.

³⁵ Staples, ““Lord, Lord,”” 19.

³⁶ Staples, ““Lord, Lord,”” 19.

³⁷ In Matthew the angel explains Jesus’ name, *Yehoshuah* (“God saves”): “for he shall save his people from their sins” (1:21).

³⁸ For more on the absorption of Johannine baptism into the message of Jesus, see my *Mighty in Word and Deed: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 33–45, esp. 43–45.

³⁹ Lars Hartman, “*Into the Name of Jesus*”: *Baptism in the Early Church*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 37. Similarly, in Paul, comp. 1 Cor 1:3, 15; 6:11.

⁴⁰ J. A. Ziesler, “The Name of Jesus in the Acts of the Apostles,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 4 (1979), 29.

⁴¹ Wilhelm Heitmüller, *Im Namen Jesu: eine sprach- und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Neuen Testament, speziell zur altchristlichen Taufe*, (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903), 100–109, esp. 104–107. Note the use of business metaphors: *in der Geschäftssprache, auf den Nam hinein = auf das Konto*.

⁴² Heitmüller, *Im Namen Jesu*, 113; Hartman, “*Into the Name of Jesus*,” 40–41; Hub van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and Its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 284–85.

⁴³ Hartman, “*Into the Name of Jesus*,” 39.

⁴⁴ Hartman, “*Into the Name of Jesus*,” 49.

⁴⁵ See also Justin, 1 Apol 61:3b.

⁴⁶ Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Faith, Hope, and Life of the Earliest Christian Communities, 50-70 C.E.* (New York: Newman, 2003), 270–72. Given the relative brevity of the document *Pais*, “Servant,” will not bear too much weight as the preferred title for Jesus in the community that penned it. Further, the title Lord cannot be divorced from Jesus in the *Didache*.

⁴⁷ See also van de Sandt and Flusser, *The Didache*, 283–91.

⁴⁸ A play on words with *pneumatōs hagiou* in verse 4? *Pnoē* can also mean breath, and here Luke elected not to use “*anemos*, wind” which he uses elsewhere in Luke-Acts seven times. *Pnoē* is only found elsewhere in the NT in Acts 17:25: “God gives to all mortals life and breath (*pnoēn*) and all things.”

⁴⁹ Here the primal meaning of *ruach* in the OT seems present; when the Spirit enters or leaves, life begins or ceases. Note Luke’s description of both Ananias’ and Sapphira’s sudden deaths: they breathed their last or expired (NAB 5:5, 10, from *ekpsuchō*).

⁵⁰ Shelton, *Mighty in Word and Deed*, 74–84, esp. 80.

⁵¹ The name of Jesus does not take the place of Jesus on earth (Ziesler, “The Name of Jesus in the Acts of the Apostles,” 31, 38).

- ⁵² Ziesler, “The Name of Jesus in the Acts of the Apostles,” 31–32.
- ⁵³ Bruce Olson, *For This Cross I’ll Kill You* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1973), 65.
- ⁵⁴ Mark Wilson, “Conversion Story” and “The Night I Met the Devil,” in *The Spirit Said Go: Lessons in Guidance from Paul’s Journeys* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 4–6 and 142–45.
- ⁵⁵ In a conversation at Tyndale House, Cambridge, 1981.
- ⁵⁶ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 308.
- ⁵⁷ Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy: Part 1: Hell*, trans. D. Sayers (New York: Penguin, 1977). Notes on Canto XI, 139.
- ⁵⁸ “Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospels to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred rite to evangelize *all men*.” *Ad gentes divinitus*, 7, in *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. A. Flannery (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 821.

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