

HENOCH

HISTORICAL AND TEXTUAL
STUDIES IN ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL
JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

STUDI STORICO-TESTUALI
SU GIUDAISMO E CRISTIANESIMO
IN ETÀ ANTICA E MEDIEVALE

39/2 (2017)

New Series 2005

Dangerous Books

Scribal Activity and Religious Boundaries in Late Antiquity and Beyond

Flavia Ruani - Joseph E. Sanzo (eds.)



MORCELLIANA

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THE “CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM” IN LUKE-ACTS

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It has long been recognized that the pericopes usually assigned to the special material (*Sondergut*, L) of the Gospel of Luke exhibit some striking common features, which can be explained if an underlying previous source was used.¹ Yet the question of whether at least a part of the L material goes back to a single written source remains controversial. Luke was a skilled and versatile writer, which makes it somewhat arduous to establish the border between his own free literary activity and the possible content of a lost source. When he rewrites other sources – Mark and Q² – we are effectively capable of making a mutual comparison with the other synoptic gospels, but for the sections that can only be found in Luke, obviously no such comparison is possible. Thus, the only way to proceed is by exploring whether a certain feature of L bears “Lukan” characteristics, or can be related to those passages that lack any correspondence elsewhere, which could corroborate a possible pre-Lukan origin.³

The pericopes usually labelled as L are mainly the parables; however, among these, there are also a few healings and some other narrative material, which are collocated for the most part in the central section of the third Gos-

¹ For preliminary information about the L material: B. Weiss, *Die Quellen des Lukasevangeliums* (Stuttgart - Berlin: Cotta, 1907), pp. 195-277; F. Rehkopf, *Die lukanische Sonderquelle. Ihr Umfang und Sprachgebrauch* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1959); W.R. Farmer, “Notes on a Literary and Form-Critical Analysis of Some of the Synoptic Material Peculiar to Luke,” *New Testament Studies* 81 (1962), pp. 301-316; on the L parables only, but supporting the idea of an underlying source: G.W. Forbes, *The God of Old. The Role of the Lukan Parables in the Purpose of Luke’s Gospel* (JSNTSS 198; Sheffield: Academic Press, 2000). The most extensive treatment that supports a single source for the L pericopes is K. Paffenroth, *The Story of Jesus According to L* (JSNTSS 147; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997).

² I assume the two-source hypothesis, but it is worthwhile to note that adhering to the Farrer hypothesis does not essentially influence the view on the Lukan special material. M.D. Goulder was convinced that the L pericopes are mostly Luke’s own creation, both on the basis of their “Lukan” features and because they display Luke’s favourite themes, but he has not completely excluded underlying sources other than Mark and Matthew: see M.D. Goulder, *Luke. A New Paradigm* (Sheffield: JSOT Press 1989), pp. 73-128, especially p. 75: “I do not wish to suggest that Luke had no other tradition than that in Mark and Matthew”. M.S. Goodacre instead opts for Luke’s creative rewriting of some previous traditions, possibly oral: see M.S. Goodacre, *Goulder and the Gospels. An Examination of a New Paradigm* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1996), pp. 273-291.

³ The delimitation and discussion of the setting of the pericopes traditionally assigned to L goes beyond the scope of this paper. See for example J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX. Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Anchor Yale Bible 28.1; New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 83-84; Paffenroth, *The Story of Jesus*, pp. 26-65.

pel, interwoven with the Q material.⁴ The *Sondergut* pericopes show some common characteristics. It is useful to mention the chief common interests of the L material, as particular attention is paid to the individuals in the narrative: to minor characters⁵, “lower class heroes”, women, outcasts (such as tax collectors and lepers) and the marginalized.⁶ Another interesting feature is presence of many “colourful” details in the L material, which are not really necessary in the narrative. We could also mention some repeatedly used narrative devices, such as the appearance of contrasting characters and the frequent use of dialogue, *oratio recta* and especially the interior monologue.⁷ Some of those features do not appear in Luke’s redaction of Mark and Q, and would indeed be better explained if there was an underlying a pre-Lukan source. However, other features are probably due to Lukan editorial activity. My opinion on the nature of the L material is that it derives from a pre-Lukan source, but that this source was rewritten by Luke with more freedom than he allowed himself when redacting Mark and Q.⁸

With only very limited space at my disposal, I would like to explore just one of the minor features of the L material, which in my opinion demonstrates that Luke added his own colouring when rewriting the L pericopes. Within the array of shared characteristics, it is interesting to observe that in three of the pericopes usually assigned to L, the epithet “child of Abraham” appears, which is supposed to be – independently of any demonstration of faith or repentance – a title that qualifies one to achieve a certain privilege or is, in a protagonist’s viewpoint, a reason for asking such privilege.

The peculiar feature of these references in the *Sondergut* pericopes is that they apply to individuals, not to a group. Elsewhere in his two-volume work, Luke never employs the expression “Abraham’s son/daughter” with reference to an individual person, but only to a certain group, a collectivity. Thus, the logical deduction would be that the mentions of Abraham’s children could be a feature of his special source.⁹ In two of these pericopes, the “child of Abraham” who is referred to, despite being an outcast, obtains Jesus’s help and attention. In the third occurrence there is a reversal of this situation, and even if the kinship with Abraham is acknowledged, the request for help

⁴ I follow Paffenroth in the opinion that the infancy narrative and the special material in the Passion are to be excluded from the material labelled as L; for argumentation, cf. Paffenroth, *The Story of Jesus*, pp. 27-30.

⁵ For the designation “minor characters” (those to whom the ministry of Jesus was addressed, but with the exclusion of the disciples and the crowds, who are major characters), see J.D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Luke: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1991), p. 91.

⁶ Goulder, *Luke*, p. 97.

⁷ See G.P. Anderson, “Seeking and Saving What Might Have Been Lost: Luke’s Restoration of an Enigmatic Parable Tradition,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70 (2008), pp. 729-739; P. Sellew, “Interior Monologue as a Narrative Device in the Parables of Luke,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111/2 (1992), pp. 239-253.

⁸ Thus my opinion is similar to that of M.S. Goodacre, *Goulder and the Gospels*, pp. 282-287.

⁹ Paffenroth, *The Story of Jesus*, pp. 134-135.

remains unanswered. In the following pages, I will try to explore how the mentions of Abraham's offspring differ from the allusions to Abraham in the remaining parts of Luke-Acts, and whether they can be really considered a specific feature of the special material, and thus pre-Lukan.

1. The children of Abraham in L

A daughter of Abraham: The crippled woman

The first mention of "a child of Abraham" can be found in Luke 13:16, in the episode of Jesus's healing of the crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17).¹⁰ This miraculous healing took place while he was teaching at a synagogue on the Sabbath. The setting in a synagogue gives a distinctly Jewish flavour to the episode. A woman "disabled by a spirit" (πνεῦμα ἔχουσα ἀσθενείας, Luke 13:11), such that she was hunched over for 18 years, appeared or was there at the synagogue.¹¹ Although the woman didn't make any request for healing, Jesus saw her, called to her and asserted that she was set free (ἀπολύω) from her infirmity.¹² Having said this, Jesus also laid his hands upon her. This ignites a dispute with the head of the synagogue (ἀρχισυνάγωγος), who accuses Jesus of having violated the restrictions prohibiting work on the Sabbath.¹³ Applying the argument *a minore ad maius*, Jesus stated that if the animals could be released from their tethers to lead them to water on Sabbath, obviously it was even more permissible to untie "a daughter of Abraham" from pain in the same day (ταύτην δὲ θυγατέρα Ἀβραάμ οὕσαν, ἣν ἔδησεν ὁ σατανᾶς ἰδοὺ δέκα καὶ ὀκτὼ ἔτη, οὐκ ἔδει λυθῆναι ἀπὸ τοῦ δεσμοῦ τούτου τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ σαββάτου, Luke 13:16).

¹⁰ On the healing of the crippled woman, see I.H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC 3; Grand Rapids, Mi.; Paternoster Press, 1978), pp. 556-555; J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Anchor Yale Bible 28.2; New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 1009-1014; M. D. Hamm, "The Freeing of the Bent Woman and the Restoration of Israel: Luke 13:10-17 as Narrative Theology," in *Journal for the Study of New Testament* 31 (1987), pp. 23-44 (Hamm however considers the episode as a rewriting of Mark 3:1-6); and T.K. Seim, *The Double Message. Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts* (London - New York: T&T Clark, 2004).

¹¹ An expression similar to πνεῦμα ἔχουσα ἀσθενείας can be found in Luke 8:2, in which some women (including Mary, called the Magdalene) are healed ἀπὸ πνευμάτων πονηρῶν καὶ ἀσθενειῶν. The textual variants of Ν and Θ (ἀκαθαρτῶν instead of πονηρῶν) show that the spirit of infirmity was also associated with impurity. The number of 18 years – δέκα καὶ ὀκτὼ ἔτη – is a kind of a catchword by which the pericopes of L are connected; see the episode that precedes the healing of the bent woman, also from the *Sondergut*: Luke 13:4 (18 people killed by the fall of a tower at Siloam).

¹² The lack of a request for a miracle can be found in another healing episode in L, which also involves a woman: namely, the raising from death of the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17). On requests for healings, see G. Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 53-55.

¹³ In the L stories, Jesus apparently violates the Law several times (Luke 7:14; 14:3-5).

Indicating the woman as a “daughter of Abraham” (θυγάτηρ Ἀβραάμ), Jesus points out that she belongs to the Jewish people, then participates in Abraham’s blessing. This fact overrules her status of minor social importance as a woman, and moreover her being affected by a visible infirmity.¹⁴ Despite this, Jesus underlines her right to be healed in spite of the restrictions on the Sabbath.¹⁵ To be akin to Abraham appears to be a sufficient reason for obtaining a certain privilege.

This pericope lacks the specific Lukan language of repentance. Moreover, there is no mention of the woman’s faith that could grant her the healing, in contrast to other acts of healing in Luke (8:48 and 18:42, both having Mark as a source), for which it is clearly stated that it was faith that permitted the recovery. The woman is voiceless, and has no other merits than her being bound to Abraham. The verb ἀπολύω, “release” (Luke 13:12, λύω in 13:20), is opposed to δεσμός, “bondage”, and it refers to freeing someone from a physical infirmity. This pun is a clear allusion to the Cantic of Simeon in the Lukan infancy narrative, in which the expression ἀπολύεις τὸν δοῦλόν σου, δέσποτα (Luke 2:29) recalls the words of Abraham in Gen 15:2 (δέσποτα τί μοι δώσεις ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπολύομαι ἄτεκνος). Therefore, the imagery of setting the woman free from her condition is also implicitly associated with Abraham.

The expression “daughter of Abraham” is unique; it neither appears elsewhere in the New Testament, nor does Luke attribute Abrahamic descent to any other woman.¹⁶ It was argued that this reference to the daughter of Abraham has similarities with the imagery of 4 Maccabees.¹⁷ In 4 Maccabees

¹⁴ The symbolic value of this episode seems to go beyond the social inclusion of the poor in the message of Jesus (as suggested in J.S. Siker, “From Gentile Inclusion to Jewish Exclusion: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy with Jews,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 19, 1989, pp. 30-36), not to mention the fact that it is not said whether the woman was poor or not. On the one hand, one cannot deny its strong connection with the anti-demoniac mission of Jesus, in the context of the common association of physical illness with demonic possession: on this see J.R. Kirk, *A Man Attested by God: The Human Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), p. 478. Upon closer scrutiny, however, further meanings can also be discovered, and antecedents in biblical literature could possibly be detected. Among these, the more persuasive lies perhaps in the story of David and Mephiboshet – the crippled heir of Saul, rehabilitated by David and admitted both to his table and to the royal palace – whose ethical and symbolic value has recently received some attention: see J. Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006); R. Raphael, *Biblical Corpora: Representations of Disability in Hebrew Biblical Literature* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

¹⁵ R.C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts. A Literary Interpretation. 1. The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 136.

¹⁶ J. Jervell, “The Daughters of Abraham: Women in Acts,” in Id., *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publ. House, 1984), pp. 146-157, 148; see also the discussion in Seim, *The Double Message*, pp. 39-50.

¹⁷ N.A. Dahl, “The Story of Abraham in Luke-Acts,” in L.E. Keck - J.L. Martyn (eds.), *Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 141 and 155; Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, pp. 1012-1014 and Id., *Luke I-IX*, p. 122; Seim, *The Double Message*, pp. 43-46 and Id., “Abraham, Ancestor or Archetype? A Comparison

bees, the mother of the seven brethren is indeed associated several times with Abraham. A closer look at the passages in question, however, shows that in 4 Maccabees the connection with Abraham is based on completely different grounds. The mother of the martyrs is defined as similar in thought with Abraham (Ἀβρααμ ὁμόψυχος, "one in soul", 4 Macc 14:20). As for the expression ἀλλάτῆς θεοσεβοῦς Ἀβρααμ καρτερίας ἡ θυγάτηρ ἐμνήσθη in 4 Macc 15:28, it must be noted that the woman is literally called "a daughter of the endurance (καρτερίας) of Abraham", and not a "daughter of Abraham". The term Ἀβρααμίτις in 4 Macc 18:20 also emphasizes the similarity to Abraham from a moral point of view.¹⁸ The focus is on the exemplary piety of the woman: the mother of seven martyrs is connected to Abraham because she is ready, as the patriarch was, to sacrifice her own sons for the faith, not yielding to emotions. The crippled woman in Luke 13:10-17, on the other hand, doesn't show any particular piety or faith, nor does she even ask for help. Her title "daughter of Abraham" and the privileges deriving from it are granted to her simply due to her being one of the Jewish people.

A wealthy outcast: Zacchaeus

The second instance of someone's dignity linked to their being a "son of Abraham" can be found in the episode of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) chief tax collector of Jericho, thus considered a sinner *par excellence* in the eyes of the crowd, who consider him unworthy of offering hospitality to Jesus.¹⁹

In addition to being a social outcast because of his job, Zacchaeus also had a visible physical limitation (though not a physical infirmity, as was the case of the crippled woman above): he was a very short man, to the extent that he had to climb a sycamore to see Jesus passing in the crowd.²⁰ Thus he suffered a double form of social isolation in his Jewish milieu, and his discomfort is effectively underlined by his unusual action: he climbs a tree – probably not the conduct one would expect from a local official – possibly also so as not to be seen by the others. Jesus however notices him and, surprisingly, invites himself to his house. Later on, Jesus publicly affirms that salvation was also

of Abraham-Language in 4Maccabees and Luke-Acts," in A. Yarbro Collins - M.M. Mitchell (eds.), *Antiquity and Humanity. Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy Presented to H.D. Betz on his 70th Birthday* (Tübingen 2001), pp. 27-42.

¹⁸ Seim, *The Double Message*, 46-47.

¹⁹ See W.P. Loewe, "Towards an Interpretation of Lk 19: 1-10," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974), pp. 321-331; J. O'Hanlon, "The Story of Zacchaeus and the Lukan Ethic," *Journal for the Study of New Testament* 12 (1981), pp. 2-26; A.A.C. Mitchell, "Zacchaeus Revisited: Luke 19, 8 as a Defense," *Biblica* 71 (1990), pp. 154-176; and J.B. Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts: Divine Action, Human Cognition, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), pp. 105-119.

²⁰ People also possibly showed hostility to Zacchaeus, preventing him access to the front where he, despite his short stature, would have been able to see; cf. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity*, pp. 122-123.

granted to Zacchaeus because he is a son of Abraham too (καθότι καὶ αὐτὸς υἱὸς Ἀβραάμ ἐστιν, Luke 19:9).²¹ The use of the explicative καθότι²² reinforces the view that Zacchaeus deserved salvation mainly for his kinship with Abraham, not for his eagerness to see Jesus nor for his joy at the encounter (19:6); there is no mention of a special faith, even if Zacchaeus is aware of the salvific vehicle represented by good deeds.²³ Here again, the mere belonging to the offspring of Abraham allows for his salvation.²⁴

A son of Abraham in the afterworld

The kinship with Abraham is also mentioned in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which is situated shortly before Zacchaeus's story, as the conclusion of chapter 16 (Luke 16:19-31).²⁵ Despite this ostensible narrative continuity, however, in this parable an inversion of the situation of a child of Abraham occurs. The rich man, tormented in the afterlife for his way of life – for he unexpectedly finds himself in Hades (ἐν τῷ ᾄδῃ) – addresses Abraham directly three times as his father (πάτερ Ἀβραάμ), probably expecting some help from the patriarch because of this.²⁶ His request for relief is motivated only by their kinship, not because of his virtue (as he had none in his earthly life) or because of his previous, important position: he is indeed aware that his conduct led to the punishment.²⁷ It has been also hypothesized that this scene was modelled on Gen 15, concerning Abraham's heritage, where both the names Abraham (at this point still Abram) and Eliezer (Lazarus) appear: in fact, Abraham's servant in Gen 15:2 was actually a Gentile, a "Damascene". But this connection seems a bit arduous to maintain.²⁸

²¹ Zacchaeus, who bears a distinctively Jewish name (Zakkay, meaning "pure, innocent") is clearly a Jew: Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 4,37,1, thought he was a Gentile.

²² Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 698; Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, p. 1226.

²³ Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, p. 1224.

²⁴ This contradicts the interpretation of E.E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2003), p. 220, who sees the expression "son of Abraham" in a spiritual sense.

²⁵ On the parable and all its possible relationships with Egyptian folktales and images of the afterlife in other sources: Marshall, *Luke*, p. 632-639; Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XIV*, pp. 1124-1136. The most extensive treatment of the imagery in the parable is in O. Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery in Luke's Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus* (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2007).

²⁶ Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery*, p. 168.

²⁷ Not convincing is W.R. Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster - John Knox, 1994), p. 130, according to whom the quest of the rich man is motivated by social status, and the point of the story lies in the reversal of the social order, when the poor man is rewarded.

²⁸ J.D.M. Derrett, "Fresh Light on St. Luke xvi:11: Dives and Lazarus and the Preceding Sayings," *New Testament Studies* 7 (1961), pp. 364-380; C.H. Cave, "Lazarus and the Lukan Deuteronomy," *New Testament Studies* 15 (1968), pp. 319-325. It is worth noting that Lazarus is the only protagonist mentioned by name in a parable of Jesus. Some connection with the Lazarus of Bethany in John 11, also because of the theme of resurrection, is to be suspected. The name of the rich man appears as Νευης in P⁷⁵ see H.J. Cadbury, "A proper name for

Unlike the rich man, in the Lukan parable Lazarus in fact does not even need to address Abraham as his "father", since after his death he goes directly into his arms (ἐν τοῖς κόλποις αὐτοῦ, Luke 16:23).²⁹ A reversal of fortunes occurs, which is a common feature in Lukan stories: Abraham indeed recognizes his kinship with the (always unnamed) rich man, gently calling him "child" (τέκνον, Luke 16:25), but he also explains that the blessings deriving from this heritage were already enjoyed in his lifetime, as richness and a good life, but are now expired. Without piety and correct behaviour, in the afterlife the benefit of heavenly reunification with the patriarch can be afforded only to people like the less fortunate Lazarus.³⁰ The position of Lazarus, held to Abraham's bosom, indicates that he was invited into some kind of fellowship with the patriarch, and it seems that the image of the banquet fellowship is intended here – a motif frequently encountered in Luke – and not a kind of spiritual-parental kinship, as has been suggested.³¹ Abraham's refusal of the rich man's request, however, seems to be the crucial point of the narrative.³²

If compared with the two previous episodes, there is a striking difference: the message here is that just being (or claiming to be) a "son of Abraham" is simply not enough for salvation. Those who rejected the message – like the Jews who were the first heirs to the promise given to Abraham by the Lord – have failed.³³ This passage shows a similarity with the notion in the Q material that Abrahamic lineage is not sufficient for salvation, which will be discussed below.

2. Abraham in Luke-Acts

There are still other references to the patriarch in the two-volume Lukan work, and it can be useful to see how the author of Luke-Acts saw the char-

Dives," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81/4 (1962), pp. 399-402; Id., "The Name for Dives," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84/1 (1965), pp. 73.

²⁹ Cave, "Lazarus and the Lukan Deuteronomy," 323-325.

³⁰ V. Tanghe, "Abraham, son fils et son envoyé" (Luc 16:19-31)," *Revue Biblique* 91 (1984), pp. 557-577.

³¹ Several proposals were put forward concerning the meaning of his position at the bosom (κόλπος) of Abraham, clearly connected with the funerary and afterlife sphere. There is a comparison with the use of κόλπος in epitaphs in R.F. Hock, "Lazarus and Miccyllus: Greco-Roman Backgrounds to Luke 16, 19-31," *Journal in Biblical Literature* 106 (1987), pp. 447-463. A trace of a parent-child relationship can be also detected due to the use of κόλπος in John 1:18; see T.W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1949), p. 299. For the banquet fellowship, an image which seems preferable, see Marshall, *Luke*, p. 636 and Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery*, 216-218; on the discussion of the motif of the table fellowship in Luke, see specifically D.E. Smith, "Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1987), pp. 613-638.

³² R. Bauckham, "The Rich Man and Lazarus. The Parable and the Parallels," *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991), pp. 225-246, 115-116.

³³ P.F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts. The Social and Political Motivations of Lukan Theology* (SNTSMS 57; Cambridge U.P., 1987), pp. 119-120.

acter of Abraham, and if the notion of being one of his offspring truly was important to him.

Traditions connected with Abraham were quite widespread in early Judaism, where chief attention was given to God's promise to Abraham, to his exemplary faith and obedience, and to the role of Abraham as a symbolic mediatory figure. Therefore, it is understandable that Luke was naturally influenced by those deep-seated traditions, making frequent recourse to Abraham both explicitly and as a model, considering that the theme of prophetic fulfillment is one of his main concerns, along with the restoration of Israel.³⁴ For instance, Luke uses Abraham and Sarah and their childlessness as typological models for the description of Zechariah and his wife; the birth, circumcision and naming of John assume the story of the birth of Isaac in Gen 21:1-3. This preference for OT exemplary tales, moreover, is one of the arguments for the Lukan authorship of the infancy narrative.

It is possible to divide the explicit mentions of Abraham (21 in total) in Lukan writings into a few thematic groups: a) references to the blessings and covenantal relationship; b) Abraham as one of the patriarchs; c) Abraham in eschatological context and in the context of judgment.³⁵ Both the understanding of Abraham simply as the ancestor of the Jews and the references to the blessings promised to Abraham's descendants are particularly relevant to the understanding of the L pericopes previously discussed.

Abraham in the third Gospel

Luke is mainly interested, as he himself states in the prologue of his gospel, in writing a historical account, although he doesn't fail to show his deep knowledge of the Scriptures. Abraham is for him the actual "father" of the

³⁴ An overview of Abrahamic traditions is found in S. Sandmel, *Philo's Place in Judaism: A Study of Conceptions of Abraham in Jewish Literature* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1965, New York 1972²); H. Moxnes, *Theology in Conflict: Studies in Paul's Understanding of God in Romans* (NT Suppl. 53; Leiden: Brill, 1980), pp. 117-206; J.S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster - John Knox Press, 1991), pp. 17-27; and A. Mühlhng, "Blickt auf Abraham, euren Vater". *Abraham als Identifikationsfigur des Judentums in der Zeit des Exils und des Zweiten Tempels* (FRLANT 236; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011). On Abraham in the LXX: A. Passoni Dell'Acqua, "Da 'Abram l'emigrante' ad 'Abraam l'amato da Dio'. Sfumature del ritratto 'abramitico' di scuola ellenistica (LXX)," *Ricerche Storico-Bibliche* 26 (2014) [= A. Passaro - A. Pitta (eds.), *Abramo tra storia e fede. XLII Settimana Biblica Nazionale (Roma, 10-14 Settembre. 2012)*], pp. 169-203. On Abraham in Luke, valuable introductory remarks are found in C. Brocardo, "Tra il primo piano e lo sfondo. Abramo nel Vangelo secondo Luca," *ibi*, pp. 313-325; and in M. Marcheselli, "'Poiché ho cinque fratelli...'" (Lc 16,28a): se c'è un padre ci sono dei fratelli," *Protestantesimo* 71 (2016), pp. 165-184. For the restoration of Israel in Luke, see D. Ravens, *Luke and the Restoration of Israel* (JSNTS . 119; Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) and M.F. Fuller, *The Restoration of Israel: Israel's Re-gathering and the Fate of the Nations in Early Jewish Literature and Luke Acts* (BZNW 138; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006).

³⁵ Goulder, *Luke*, p. 106 and pp. 237-238; Dahl, "The Story of Abraham," p. 140.

Jews, their common ancestor, as was true for Josephus, portraying Abraham as ὃς ἦν πάντων Ἑβραίων πατήρ (*Ant. Jud.* 14:255).³⁶ This could explain the references to Abraham's children in the L pericopes in a literal and not a figurative sense. Generally, Luke makes allusions to and adds quotations from the Pentateuch not simply to corroborate a particular theological concept (as he does, for instance, in quoting from Isaiah and Psalms), but to affirm the continuity of Jewish Law in the ministry of Jesus and its importance for his disciples and followers. Thus Abraham as well as Isaac and Jacob are indicated as "our fathers" when the target audience is explicitly formed by Jews. The focus is on a physical descent, but we have to remember, that it was precisely the blood descent from Abraham guaranteed the covenantal promise.³⁷ Luke uses also the expression "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" three times, twice in the speeches and once in a passage derived from Mark.³⁸ This expression was a traditional, fixed formula, recurring everywhere in Jewish literature from Gen 50:24 onwards, and was still widespread in first-century Judaism, retaining its magic value and symbolic meaning.³⁹ Abraham obviously appears in the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3:34.

From the very beginning of the third Gospel, the promise that God made to Abraham's offspring and the mutual covenant (Gen 22:16-17) is also a recurring motif.⁴⁰ In the three hymns of the infancy narrative, it is clearly stated that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise made to the Fathers, as in the *Magnificat* to Abraham and his seed: a promise made τῷ Ἀβραάμ καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ (Luke 1:55; cf. Gen 17:9). In the Cantic of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79), the kinship of the Jewish people with Abraham is again underlined, recalling the oath and the covenant (at the circumcision, which is also the setting of the *Benedictus*) granted by God (Gen 17:22) πρὸς Ἀβραάμ τὸν πατέρα ἡμῶν (Luke 1:73). Also in the *Nunc Dimittis*, an allusion to Abraham appears within the subtle wordplay, already mentioned above: δέσποτα τί μοι δώσεις ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπολύομαι (Gen 15:2) and νῦν ἀπολύεις τὸν δοῦλόν σου, δέσποτα (Luke 2:29).

³⁶ L.H. Feldman, "Hellenizations in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*: The Portrait of Abraham," in L.H. Feldman - G. Hata (eds.), *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity* (Detroit: Wayne State U.P., 1987), pp. 133-153.

³⁷ That is, upon the fulfillment of the condition of circumcision: on this, see P.R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel and the Nations: the Patriarchal Promise and its Covenantal Development in Genesis* (JSOTSS 315; Sheffield: Academic Press, 2000), p. 205. On the discussion if the covenant was restricted only to the physical lineage of Abraham and Sarah see *ibi*, pp.157-162.

³⁸ Luke 20:37; Acts 3:13; 7:32. See E. Richard, "Acts 7: An Investigation of the Samaritan Evidence," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977), pp. 190-208, 200-202.

³⁹ M. Rist, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: A Liturgical and Magical Formula," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 57 (1938), pp. 289-303.

⁴⁰ Dahl, "The Story of Abraham," p. 142; F. Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Fifty-five Years of Research (1950-2005)* (2nd rev. ed.; Waco: Baylor U.P., 2006), pp. 100-101.

Abraham and his offspring in the Acts

The promise theme appears anew in three very significant speeches included in Acts.⁴¹ Here too the general message is that the promise granted to Abraham had its fulfillment in Jesus, with the difference that, while in the third Gospel, Jesus addressed the Jews, after their refusal of the message they were given, it was successively offered to the Gentiles by Jesus' apostles, as related in Acts. However, an important distinction is always maintained in Luke's two volumes: Gentiles are never addressed as "Abraham's children".

The first example is in the address delivered by Peter to the Jews in Jerusalem, at Solomon's Portico (Acts 3:13). Peter employs a quotation from Exod 3:6, where Abraham as well as Isaac and Jacob are recalled as the Fathers of Jews. The quotation slightly diverges from the LXX text, because ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρὸς σου (Ex 3:6) switches to the plural form "fathers" (ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν, Act 3:13), and the name of Abraham is moved to the beginning of the phrase, possibly for emphasis.⁴² Later on (Acts 3:25), Peter reminds his audience that they were sons of the covenant with Abraham, and that Jesus was thus sent to them, Abraham's offspring, first (cf. 13:46 for the same concept of the priority given to the Jews).⁴³ Here the Gentile mission was not yet in view.⁴⁴

The second instance is in Stephen's defensive speech in Acts 7, which is rich with allusions to the Pentateuch.⁴⁵ In the first part of this discourse, a summary of Israel's history and road to salvation, Stephen puts some emphasis on the figure of Abraham, on the promise he received, underlining his own belonging to Abraham's lineage (Acts 7:2; cf. 1Qap Gen 22:27). Again, in Acts 7:7, the promise of offspring (from Gen 15:1, 5) and the covenant with Abraham (Acts 7:8), which was a guarantee of the promise, is mentioned.⁴⁶ As is known, this speech represents a turning point in the narrative

⁴¹ F. Grygiewicz, "Die Herkunft der Hymnen des Kindheitsevangeliums des Lukas," *New Testament Studies* 21 (1975), pp. 265-273, has demonstrated how the language of the canticles of the infancy narrative is appropriated in the speeches of Acts.

⁴² D.I. Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology* (JSNTS 12; Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), p. 137.

⁴³ F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Revised Edition; NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 88.

⁴⁴ J.A. Meek, *The Gentile Mission in Old Testament Citations in Acts: Text, Hermeneutic and Purpose* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2008), p. 114.

⁴⁵ The speech of Stephen presents many textual problems, and the use of various sources has been proposed: see A.F.J. Klijn, "Stephen's Speech-Acts VII, 2-53," *New Testament Studies* 4 (1957-1958), pp. 25-31. For a theory of a Samaritan source, see Richard, "Acts 7"; for an authentic (and unlikely) account of Stephen's defence, F.F. Bruce, *The Speeches in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Cambridge U.P., 1973), p. 132.

⁴⁶ Opening the speech with a reference to the descent from Abraham is very important, because it means that Stephen saw the Hellenists as Jews, not as Gentiles. The existence of the two distinct groups in the Jerusalem church was introduced in the chapter 6 of the Acts: for the challenge of the traditional, since F.C. Baur view on this division see C.C. Hill, *Hellenists and Hebrews: Reappraising Division within the Earliest Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press,

of Acts, because it contains a harsh judgment of the Jews and the Gentile mission is alluded to.⁴⁷

The third case is found in Paul's speech held in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (Asia Minor), where he addresses an audience composed of Jews and God-fearers as *ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, υἱοὶ γένους Ἀβραάμ καὶ οἱ ἐν ὑμῖν φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν* (Acts 13:26).⁴⁸ Here he tries to underline the special status granted to Israelites by their kinship with the patriarch himself.⁴⁹ The expression *γένους Ἀβραάμ* is typical of Jewish literature in Greek (cf. 1 Macc 12:21; *Test. of Naphtali* 110; *Ios. Ant. Jud.* 5, 113), but the overall language is Lukan and reflects the verses of the *Magnificat*, where the descent from the patriarchs is emphasized, while also showing that a continuity can be traced from the patriarchs to Jesus. The descent from the patriarchs is also emphasized in Acts 13:33, where it is repeated that the message was given to Abraham's descendants in the first place, and only when they rejected it, was it offered to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-49).⁵⁰

As we see, the shift and the passage of the blessings from the Jews to the Gentiles and the actual Gentile mission is developed only in Acts, but not yet in the Third Gospel.⁵¹ Yet this theme prompts us to reconsider the possible allusion to Genesis 15: 2-4, as proposed for the parable of the rich man.⁵² If Lazarus was meant to represent a Gentile as Eliezer of Damascus, Abraham's servant, he could thus stand for the Gentiles who obtain mercy, whereas the rich man of Jewish descent lost his entitlement to his blessings and was severely judged. The promise and fulfillment pattern of salvation history is in fact one of the favourite themes of Luke, and at the beginning of the Gospel he mentions promises that also include the Gentiles (Luke 2:30-32; 3:6; 4:21). This is only speculation, however, as it is not certain if the book of Genesis, 15 was alluded to in the story of the rich man and Lazarus.⁵³

1992). As I have tried to underline in this article, Luke never applies the notion of Abrahamic descent to the Gentiles; cf. S.G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), p.129.

⁴⁷ It is worthwhile to underline that in fact the actual content of the speech is focused on the rejection of the Jews, and does not refer explicitly to the Gentile mission; nonetheless, it constitutes a shift that marks the departure from the Jews, whereas the Gentiles are approached instead: Wilson, *The Gentiles and Gentile Mission*, pp. 136, 165.

⁴⁸ Dahl, "The Story of Abraham," p. 148.

⁴⁹ *γένους Ἀβραάμ* corresponds to the previous *ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλῖται* in Acts 13:16. It is worth noting that the particle *καὶ* in *καὶ οἱ ἐν ὑμῖν φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν* is absent in some manuscripts (such as B and P⁴⁵): its omission substantially alters the significance of the phrase, because *φοβούμενοι* would receive a restrictive meaning and Acts 13:26 would thus regard not the Gentiles but the children of Abraham as the actual God-fearers. M

⁵⁰ S.G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts*, pp. 222-224; Dahl, "The Story of Abraham," p. 149.

⁵¹ "Luke does not anachronistically place the Gentile mission within the earthly ministry of Jesus": Wilson, *The Gentiles and Gentile Mission*, p.52.

⁵² Cave, "Lazarus and the Lukan Deuteronomy".

⁵³ Cf. the critique in Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery*, pp. 30-31.

However, as we shall explore in the next section, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is connected to the notion of the judgment of the Jews.

Abraham and the Judgment

The very distinctive view of kinship with Abraham, contrasting with the mentions of benefits deriving solely from blood relation, is visible in those parts of the third Gospel deriving from Q, where Abraham appears in the context of the Final Judgment.

A passage from the apocalyptic preaching of John the Baptist in Luke 3:7-9 shows that the conditions of the promise had already changed in the days of the Baptist, and that mere kinship with Abraham was no longer sufficient for obtaining salvation. John addresses the crowd with harsh words, questioning the value of physical descent from Abraham (πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν Ἀβραάμ, Luke 3:8; cf. Matt 3:7, 10). In fact, it is said that God is capable of raising new children of Abraham even from the stones (δύναται ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τῶν λίθων τούτων ἐγεῖραι τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραάμ, Luke 3:8).⁵⁴

The necessity of repentance for salvation is also stressed in a saying about entry and rejection in the kingdom: it can be found in Luke 13:28, also from Q (cf. Matt 8:11-12), where Abraham – along with Isaac and Jacob – appears in an eschatological context.⁵⁵ It is meaningful that Luke exhibits an inverted the order of the the sayings with respect to Matt 8:11-12, which in the eschatological feast includes “many from East and West” who will sit at the eschatological table with Abraham.⁵⁶ In fact, Luke quotes two separate sayings, the first one (13:28) about the exclusion of the Jews from the kingdom of God, the second (13:29) concerning the many “coming from East and West”. Unlike in Matthew, however, this latter group does not explicitly substitute the Jews at the table of Abraham.⁵⁷ It is evident that in the passages originating from Q, Abraham is associated with the Judgment, and that mere kinship with the patriarch gives no special benefits, which contrasts neatly with the situation in the first two of the L passages, on the healing of the crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17) and the story of Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10).

The situation of the rich man in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 is strikingly similar to the situation of the Jews being reproached by John the Baptist in Q.⁵⁸ In the L parable, the rich man, just like the unrepentant Jews in the Q passage, appeals to the kinship with Abraham,

⁵⁴ A wordplay based on Aramaic: see M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967³), p. 145. Cf. Dan 6:25, and possibly also Isa 51:1.

⁵⁵ Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, p. 1022.

⁵⁶ Matt 8:11-12, in its approach to Gentiles, is linked to the praise of the centurion’s faith.

⁵⁷ Marshall, *Luke*, p. 564; Dahl, “The Story of Abraham,” p. 157, note 46.

⁵⁸ The best treatment of the theme of judgment in Q is in J.S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999 [originally published Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987]), pp. 102-121.

but the mere appeal to his physical descent from Abraham does not suffice for salvation. What is needed is repentance. The motif of repentance in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is indeed developed in vv. 27-31, and it is consistent with the focus on repentance, illustrated in some other L parables.⁵⁹ However, we have to note that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, differently from Luke 3:7-9 and other Q passages that regard judgment, focuses on the individual eschatology.⁶⁰

3. Material vs. spiritual belonging to Abraham

The survey of the range of references to Abraham in Luke-Acts shows that Luke, in his references to Abraham, usually means physical, blood descent, and that Abraham's offspring are Jews. For the most part, he lacks the expressly Christian view that the notion of Abrahamic descent refers not to Jewishness itself, but to a spiritual kinship, in which others can participate because of their faith.⁶¹ In his writings, hints of the notion that kinship with Abraham is not enough for obtaining salvation are visible only in the Q passages. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus seems to adopt a mixed position. The kinship with Abraham is always meant in a literal sense, because Abraham recognizes his relation to the rich man and confirms that he had enjoyed his blessings in earthly life. However, this bond is not sufficient in the afterlife and does not grant salvation.

⁵⁹ D.M. Parrott, "The Dishonest Steward (Luke 16.1-8a) and Luke's Special Parable Collection," *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991), pp. 499-515; 508-509.

⁶⁰ Luke seems to exhibit disparate views on eschatology in his works; there are passages that seem to support collective eschatology, as well as those, such as the parable in question, that focus on individual eschatology. On individual eschatology in Luke, see J.T. Carroll, *Response to the End of History: Eschatology and Situation in Luke-Acts* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 1988), pp. 60-64; and Lehtipuu, *Afterlife Imagery*, pp. 255-264. I agree with Lehtipuu that Luke is not consistent in his views (pp. 63-64). As seen from the comparison of the Q passage with the L passage, it may depend on the views exhibited in the sources he used. See also A. Somov, *Representations of the Afterlife in Luke-Acts* (London-Oxford et. al.: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), pp. 189-221, on the differing views on eschatology.

⁶¹ Paul sustains that it is possible to belong to Abraham's offspring in a spiritual sense (Gal 3:7; Rom 4:16). For a comparison of Paul's view with rabbinic sources see I. Rosen-Zvi, "Pauline Traditions and the Rabbis: Three Case Studies," *Harvard Theological Review* 110 (2017), pp. 169-94, 173. John underlines that current opinion among the Jews regarding the importance of physical descent from Abraham is entirely mistaken (John 8:33-40), Belonging to Abraham's posterity is not achieved by genealogy, but through deeds. Even worse, Jews who speak that way demonstrate that they are not Abraham's children, but offspring of the devil (ὁμοίως ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστὲ, John 8:44), see: H. Hoet, "Abraham is our Father (John 8:39): The Gospel of John and Jewish-Christian Dialogue," in R. Bieringer et al. (eds.), *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel. Papers of the Leuven Colloquium, 2000* (JCHS 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001), pp. 187-201. For the anti-Judaic development in Justin, according to whom the Christians have become the children of Abraham, while the Jews were deprived of their Abrahamic heritage, see F. Blanchetière, "The threefold Christian Anti-Semitism," in G.N. Stanton and G.G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 185-210.

4. *Are the references to the children of Abraham in L pericopes distinctive?*

Based on the comparison of the L pericopes with other passages that mention Abraham's offspring in both the third Gospel and the Acts, it can be discerned that the references to the children of Abraham in the L material are peculiar mostly because they regard certain individuals – even a woman, or people with various difficulties – as somehow excluded from Jewish society. Elsewhere in Luke-Acts, the only mentions of the offspring of Abraham refer to a community or other collective. However, this difference is not so significant, and is explainable because the mentions of Abraham's offspring as a collectivity are included in speeches in the Acts, where the target audience is mainly represented by the gathered Jews. Instead, the L pericopes in general focus on the fate of the individuals and have particular characters as protagonists.⁶²

The particular attention Luke pays to the figure of Abraham, to the promise and the covenant and the frequent allusions to his descent, both in the third Gospel and in Acts, allows us to conclude that the mentions of the “children of Abraham” in the L pericope have Lukan overtones.⁶³ Moreover, the language of release associated with Abraham in Luke 13 is the same as that used in the infancy narratives, and attest to the Lukan redactional hand in the L material.

The “children of Abraham” in the L stories are exclusively Jews, but even elsewhere, Luke never mentions Christians in such terms. The mentions of the “children of Abraham” are consistent with his view that the promise made to the offspring of the patriarch has its fulfillment in Jesus: Jesus himself firstly addresses the Jews in the third Gospel. He offers help both to sons and daughters of Abraham, especially if they are considered impure or sinners. But these are properly the themes embedded in the L stories, which feature such outcasts as women, lepers and tax collectors as their main characters. The L stories, as mentioned in the introduction to this article, focus on the excluded, on the silent people who don't even dare to ask for help.

This by no means precludes an underlying source for these parts of the third Gospel, but simply indicates that Luke has thoroughly rewritten the source(s), giving them his own colouring, which is what confers to those stories their special charm and appeal.

⁶² See the introduction.

⁶³ Thus the view of Paffenroth that the mentions betray the views of the “L community,” cannot be confirmed (see Paffenroth, *The Story of Jesus*, p. 157).

ABSTRACT

This essay investigates the use of the expression "Abraham's son/daughter" in the pericopes assigned to the special material (L) of the Gospel of Luke. First, the three pericopes usually assigned to L are examined in order to establish the meaning of this particular expression. Being a "child of Abraham" is a title that qualifies someone to achieve a certain privilege or, in the protagonist's viewpoint, is a reason for requesting such a privilege. Afterwards, a survey of the references to Abraham and his offspring in Luke-Acts is presented, illustrating that Luke attributed a particular significance to kinship with Abraham. The conclusion is that references to the "children of Abraham" in the L material rather seem to reveal Luke's own redactional hand, and do not stem from the pre-Lukan source.