



Zechariah the model priest: Luke and the characterisation of ordinary priests in Luke-Acts

**Authors:**Louis W. Ndekha^{1,2} **Affiliations:**

¹School of Liberal and Performing Arts, University of Gloucestershire, United Kingdom

²Department of New Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Research Project Registration:**Project Leader:** E. van Eck **Project Number:** 2400030**Description:**

Rev Ndekha is participating in the research project 'Hermeneutics and Exegesis', directed by Prof. Dr Ernest van Eck, Department of New Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria.

Corresponding author:

Louis Ndekha,
louis.ndekha@gmail.com

Dates:

Received: 18 Jan. 2018

Accepted: 03 Mar. 2018

Published: 30 Apr. 2018

How to cite this article:

Ndekha, L.W., 2018, 'Zechariah the model priest: Luke and the characterisation of ordinary priests in Luke-Acts', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74(1), 4916. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4916>

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This article argues that Luke's characterisation of Zechariah and the other ordinary priests in Acts 6:7 represents the most striking characterisation of the priesthood in the Gospels. This positive depiction, seen against the generally stereotypical image of chief priests in the Gospels, makes Zechariah's image that of a model priest. Such characterisation demonstrates that despite Jewish hostility towards early Christianity, not all Jewish priests were against early Christianity. Through this, the article presents a fascinating and obscure dimension of the Jewish priesthood and, therefore, helps uncover the hidden voices in the gospels' representation of Jewish priesthood.

Introduction

One of the key issues in Jesus' relationship with Jewish leadership is the extent to which the priesthood contributed to his death. The discernible trend across all four Gospels is that Jesus' conflict with Jewish leaders develops not with the chief priests but with the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Teachers of the Law. The chief priests come late into the plot of the gospel story (Mk 11:18; Mt 26:5; Lk:22:2ff.; Jn 11:18). However, their entry takes the conflict between Jesus and Jewish leaders to a critical level resulting in Jesus' death. This, by implication, makes the chief priests the arch enemies of Jesus, who are also responsible for his death (Mk 15:10). While recognising Luke's general agreement with the rest of the gospels' representation of the chief priests, scholars also acknowledge Luke's cautious and fair-toned characterisation of the chief priests and the High Priest (Bond 2004:113; Powell 1990:109). At the same time, Luke's positive portrayal of ordinary priests in contrast to the chief priest has also been recognised (Brawley 1987; Brown 1977). However, no significant and sustained attention has been paid to Luke's characterisation of Zechariah and other ordinary priests (Lk 1:5–23, 57–80; Ac 6:7) and the striking contrast it creates when compared to the negative stereotypical priestly representation in the gospel tradition. Studies on Zechariah have either concentrated on his unbelief (Brown 1988; Carter 1988:239–247; Harmon 2001; Wilson 2015:79–111) and his priestly status (Autero 2011). Even the importance of Acts 6:7 to the representation of Jewish priesthood has hardly been recognised. Therefore, using characterisation theory, this article argues that Luke's characterisation of Zechariah, seen together with the conversion of priests in Act 6:7, is not only the most positive priestly characterisation in the New Testament but also represents Luke's image of a model priest. This characterisation, understood in the light of Jewish leaders' hostility towards early Christianity, has implications for understanding the relationship between Judaism and early Christianity in Luke's story world. To demonstrate this, the article first discusses characterisation as a literary theory. Secondly, it discusses the chief priests and ordinary priests in Jewish history and Luke-Acts. Finally, it analyses Luke's characterisation of Zechariah the priest and the ordinary priests in Acts 6:7 and its implications for the image of Jewish priesthood and its attitude to early Christianity. Through this analysis, the article presents an obscure and intriguing dimension of the Jewish priesthood and, therefore, helps uncover the hidden voices in the gospels' representation of Jewish priesthood. Furthermore, the researcher is aware of the lack of scholarly consensus on the dating and the historical veracity of Luke-Acts, let alone the fact that literary studies have very little recourse to the historicity of documents. However, the article proceeds on the assumption of an early dating for Luke-Acts, between 80 and 90 AD, and that as a narrative text, Luke-Acts closely corresponds to the Hellenistic historiographical works of its time. In this case, it presents a fair record of the ministry of Jesus and that of the early Christian movement.

Literary characterisation in gospel studies

Culpepper (1983:29) defines characterisation as the art and technique by which an author fashions a convincing portrait of a person within a unified piece of writing. According to him, characterisation attempts to bring together an individual's traits and how they

shape their personality. Furthermore, characterisation studies demonstrate that characters can be categorised into three groups: flat characters, round characters and stock characters (Gowler 1991:9). Flat types or caricatures, which are simple and undeveloping, are often constructed around a single idea such as cruelty (Gowler 1991:9; Vine 2014:46). This suggests that they maintain their traits throughout the literary work. In most gospel studies, Jewish leaders are presented as flat characters, united in opposition to Jesus and responsible for his death (Cook 1978:1; Hagner 1962:961; Kingsbury 1987:57–73; Malbon 1989:280–281). A simple stereotypical image of Jewish leaders as flat characters is built on the basis of their general relationship with Jesus. This is despite individual differences within the Jewish leadership's attitude to Jesus and the early Christians with Joseph of Arimathea (Jn 19:38) and Gamaliel (Ac 5:34), respectively, as cases in point. However, except in Luke-Acts, no other dimension of the priesthood's relationship with Jesus and the early Christians is proffered. Instead, the image of the priesthood is only drawn from that of the chief priest. On the other hand, round characters are complex and developing and possess a variety of potentially conflicting traits that can surprise the reader (Gowler 1991:9; Vine 2014:46). Finally, stock characters manifest a single trait like the exemplar type found in Graeco-Roman *Bioi* (Vine 2014:46). In addition, literary critics also agree that characters are demonstrated through showing and telling (Powell 2003:52–54). This suggests that a character can be known by what he or she says and does or by what other characters or the narrator says about them (Malbon 1992:28–29). Often the narrator shapes the characters by implication, and the reader has the responsibility of inferring the author's portrayal of the characters through the events in the unfolding story (Hughes 1994:13). Furthermore, Malina and Neyrey argued that personality in classical antiquity was mostly dyadic and not individualistic (Malina & Neyrey 1991:72). This, according to them, suggests that the image fashioned from the portrait of a person or people was stereotypical of a group type. As characterisation by type was conventional in ancient literature, including history writing, it may also have influenced the way the gospels were written and interpreted in their original Graeco-Roman context (Malbon 1989:278). The fact that Luke's preface categorises itself as διήγησις, [narrative], which in the Graeco-Roman world lends itself to categories of either Historiography or *Bioi* [biography], supports this claim (Green 1997:2). Therefore, in light of the characterisation theory, Luke's presentation of Zechariah and other ordinary priests is analysed in two ways. Firstly, it is analysed from what Luke says or does not say about them *vis-à-vis* the image of the chief priests in the gospel tradition. Secondly, it is analysed from what Zechariah and the other priests say, do, and what other characters in the text available to us say to them or about them. In addition, in view of the dyadic nature of personality in ancient antiquity, the total developing picture from Luke's presentation of Zechariah and the other unnamed ordinary priests in Acts represents the general image of ordinary priests in Luke-Acts.

Chief priests and ordinary priests

In one of his papers, Himmelfarb demonstrated how in New Testament times the Jerusalem Temple was the most unrivalled institution of Jewish society (Himmelfarb 2013:79). He argued that the Temple's influence went beyond Judea to include all parts of the known world from which both Jews in diaspora and others made their yearly journeys to Jerusalem. This centrality of Temple in the life of the nation gave the priestly class, who numbered about 20 000 priests including the Levites, the status of the most important social grouping in Jewish society (Autero 2011:40; Sanders 1992:89). However, according to Sanders, there was also social classification within the priesthood itself, with some priests as elite priests and others as lower or ordinary priests. The former, often referred to in the plural as ἀρχιερείς (ἀρχή -first or leading, ἱερεύς -priest), 'leading priests' or 'chief priests', lived in Jerusalem and doubled as supervisors of the temple institution and as client rulers on behalf of the Romans (Stern 1976:194). According to Mastin and Lambert, in both the New Testament and Josephus, the term ἀρχιερεύς does not always refer to the ruling High Priest (Lambert 1906:197–198; Mastin 1976:405–412). Where the plural form ἀρχιερείς is used, a wider meaning is implied. Lambert posits that the ἀρχιερείς refers to the heads of the 24 courses into which the sons of Aaron were divided (2 Chr 23:8; Lk 1:5) (Lambert 1906:197–198). However, most scholars agree that the ἀρχιερείς were the ruling priestly aristocracy in Jerusalem who comprised former High Priests, the lay families with whom the chief priests intermarried and the prominent members of the families from which the recent High Priest had been chosen (Brown 1994:349; Cohen 2006:102; Kugler 2009:613). The last explanation is more consistent with the presentation of the chief priests in the gospels. It is also possible, as Lambert claims, that some of the ἀρχιερείς headed the priestly courses. In this case, as Horsley (2010:113) points out, the chief priests were the elite members of the priestly orders who helped the High Priest in exercising control over the religious-political-economic institutions of Judean society. Although the existence of the συνέδριον [Sanhedrin] remains highly debated, the ἀρχιερείς may have constituted the core group that the High Priest called upon on an *ad hoc* basis to deal with matters critical to the internal dynamics of early Judaism and the Jewish nation up to 70 AD (Grabbe 2008:144; Thomas 1988:196–215). The critical role of the chief priests is also evident in the Gospels.

Although Luke's fair presentation of the chief priests as compared to that of Matthew and Mark is recognised in scholarship (Bond 2004:113; Powell 1990:109), the general gospel representation of the chief priests, and therefore, Jewish priesthood, is generally negative. For example, in Mark's gospel, who is followed by Matthew and Luke, the chief priests play a key role in the plot, arrest and crucifixion of Jesus, making them the architects of Jesus' death (Mk 14:61–64). According to all the gospels, it is the chief priests who planned Jesus' death (Mt 27:1; Jn 11:45–54) and their interrogation of him led to the Sanhedrin's guilty verdict (Mk 14:61–64; Mt 26:62–66; Lk 22:66–71; Jn 18:24).

Before Pilate, it is also the chief priests who influenced the crowds to opt for Barabbas' release instead of that of Jesus (Mt 27:20). Later, in the early and latter chapters of Acts, they led the persecution of early Christians.

On the other hand, the ordinary priests, the ἱερεῖς, represented the lower cadre of the priestly class. Most of them lived in the country towns and villages but customarily went to Jerusalem to serve in the temple (Stern 1976:194). Sanders (1992:170) points out that in the villages and towns of Judea, the ordinary priests exercised leadership as teachers and magistrates. He further argues that many ordinary priests kept the commandments strictly, although there were numerous criticisms of the priesthood, especially of the aristocratic priests (Sanders 1992:188). In addition, ordinary priests were known to be opposed to the chief priests. This was largely because of the latter's political collaboration and immense privileges emanating from their control and abuse of the social and religious life of the nation (Schürer 1973:89; Schwartz 1990:92, 95). However, in spite of their confirmed commitment to the law, ordinary priests do not significantly form part of the gospel story. It is rather the image of the chief priests from which the whole priesthood is represented in the gospels. The ordinary priests, therefore, represent the muted voices within Jewish priesthood. That Zechariah was an ordinary priest is evident in the very first chapter of Luke. He comes from the hill country of Judea (1:39), which suggests that he was not a Jerusalem priest. This corresponds with historical evidence for the countryside residence of ordinary priests (Sanders 1992:170). In addition, Zechariah's priestly course, that of Abijah (1:5), was among the least of the priestly orders in Second Temple Judaism, and therefore not one from which the chief priests were drawn. It was one of the 16 orders drawn by lot out of the four surviving orders of Jedaiah, Immer, Pashur and Harim (Ezr 2:36–39) who had returned from exile (Autero 2011:40). According to Josephus, the relationship between priestly order and status within the priestly class reflected the relationship between the chief priests and ordinary priests within Second Temple Judaism (Whiston 1987:1). This confirms Zechariah's ordinary priestly status.

Zechariah the righteous priestly exemplar

Luke's depiction of Zechariah can be classified into two categories: what Luke or other characters say about Zechariah and other ordinary Priests, and what Zechariah himself and other priests do in Luke-Acts narrative. However, these two categories are interspersed across the whole of John the Baptist's birth narrative and Acts and are therefore presented as they appear in the text. Initially, it can be observed that after the prologue (1:1–4), Luke's first characters are members of an ordinary priestly family. However, the purpose of the Zechariah narratives is to portray John the Baptist's role as Jesus' forerunner. This makes Zechariah not the principal subject of the birth narratives, but his son John. Yet, it is also significant that while all the other gospels refer to John the

Baptist, only Luke has a peculiar interest in John's priestly parents. This is evident in two ways. Firstly, scholars have noted the presence of allusions to the LXX's (Septuagint) presentation of the life experiences of pious Jews such as Abraham and Sarah, Manoaah and his wife, Elkanah and Hannah in the early parts of the Zechariah narrative (Brown 1977:484; Peake & Grieve 1919:725). Like these Old Testament pious figures, Zechariah and his wife have difficulties in having children and are also visited by the Lord. Furthermore, Luke uniquely characterises Zechariah as δίκαιος and ἄμεμπτος, [righteous and blameless] (Lk 1:6). While this was partly ascribed to Abraham in Genesis 15:6, its ascription to Zechariah makes it the most positive priestly characterisation in the New Testament. Others similarly characterised are Jesus at his death (23:47) and in Acts (3:14; 7:52; 22:14), Simeon (Lk 2:25) and Joseph of Arimathea (Lk 23:50) (Parsons 2015:34). Nolland (1989:52–53) argues that as an expression of Old Testament piety, δίκαιος (1:5, 17; 2:25) in combination with ἐναντίον τοῦ θεοῦ, [before God], implies religious rather than purely ethical character, seen in obedience to God's commands and going beyond a merely external and legal righteousness. Furthermore, as Ravens (1995:18) argues, the designation ascribed to Zechariah entailed a correct understanding of the law as the ethical embodiment of God's will for his children. Such ascription of Jewish piety would have had significant implications on how Zechariah was perceived by those around him. This characterisation of Zechariah is also consistent with Sanders' (1992:188) historical representation of ordinary priests.

The above representation of Zechariah had significant implications on understanding Luke's characterisation of ordinary priests. As Harmon (2001:1) argues, the parallels between Zechariah and Old Testament pious figures place the birth of John the Baptist in continuity with the births of important figures in the history of Hebrew salvation. Extending Harmon's assertion, it can also be extrapolated that before John, and over and against the picture of the chief priests, the above parallels also place Zechariah, an ordinary priest, along the continuum of great pious Jews within the grand scheme of salvation history. Surprisingly, such special divine endowment does not follow the expected trajectory of superior pedigreed Jewish priestly families, like that of the chief priests, but instead, comes via that of an ordinary priest. Danker (1988:28) has argued that some Rabbis expressed the sentiment that God's special presence would only rest on the pedigreed families of Israel. Although by his priestly ancestry and marriage to a daughter of Aaron (v5), Zechariah and his son John qualify for divine endowment; no one expected such responsibility to rest on a priest from the hill country of Judea. That in Luke an ordinary priest experiences such special divine privilege over the High Priest or chief priests reflects some undercurrents in the relationship between the chief priests and ordinary priests. Their historically difficult relationship centred around the purity of the Temple, with the ordinary priests seeking to purify the temple by reverting to the ancient practice of appointing the High Priest instead of being chosen by political leaders such as Herod or the Roman

governors (Ford 1984:95). Therefore, in introducing the ordinary priest Zechariah as the true embodiment of Jewish and priestly piety, Luke, apart from contrasting Zechariah to the general priesthood, inadvertently echoes this priestly discord.

Some scholars have also observed that the location of Zechariah's story within the historical context of Herod's reign (Lk 1:5) provides another interesting perspective to Luke's attempts at the characterisation of Zechariah. Admittedly, in placing Zechariah's story in the time of Herod (Lk 1:5), Luke could merely be making a historical reference to ground his story to material fact, just as he locates the birth of Jesus during the time of Quirinius, governor of Syria (Lk 2:2).¹ However, Manson (1930:6) makes an interesting observation in relation to Zechariah's historical context as the time of Herod. He rightly argues that the ascription of righteousness and blamelessness to Zechariah acts as a bright counterfoil to the general spirit of the age. In addition, Ford notes that the religious and social climate of the Herodian era was one of oppressive taxation, social banditry, political discontent, and rebelliousness in which eschatological hope was nurtured by the masses (Ford 1984:13). It is, therefore, possible to argue that in characterising Zechariah as righteous and blameless, Luke demonstrates that even in these tough conditions, the purest Jewish piety kept its flame alive in Zechariah's blameless walk with God (Manson 1930:6). Furthermore, it also demonstrates that it was not only possible for Jews to keep the law blamelessly and to follow a life of pious devotion even before Jesus was born (Ravens 1995:28), but also for them to accept the revelation of God for the coming of the Messiah. In this way, Luke helps his readers to understand that if Israel opposed Jesus, it was not because of a conflict between the religion of the Old Testament and the Christian faith (Stein 1992:70). Popular anticipation for the Messiah was already in vogue. This anticipation was evident not only in the eschatological consciousness of the masses but also in the virtuous character personified by Zechariah. However, no chief priestly figure is designated the virtues ascribed to Zechariah. Therefore, by presenting Zechariah as a righteous and blameless priest, over and against the image of the chief priests, Luke, by implication, places an ordinary priest at the centre of Jewish religious life and thus representative of it (Harmon 2001:11). The above implication is further amplified by Brawley who argues that if the chief priests and the scribes were socially, politically and religiously at the forefront of Judaism, Luke's irony is even more stinging in that taking Zechariah's son to fill that responsibility means that the chief priests can no longer be taken seriously as the representatives of the people (Brawley 1987:114). Instead, Zechariah's son is to 'bring the people of Israel back to their God, turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the *δικαιος*' (Lk 1:17). In other words, Zechariah's son, John, will usher in a national revival that would bring radical individual moral changes similar to the *righteous* character of Zechariah. It can

1. Although there are dating problems with Luke's references to Herod, Quirinius and the census, within Luke's story-world, the references represent historical events to which he ties up his narrative.

also be argued that, apart from the gospels' testimony, Josephus' record of John's revivalist influence supports this Lucan claim (Whiston 1987:382). Therefore, that from the priesthood a national revival will originate presents a more interesting picture of the Jewish priesthood than is generally drawn from its general representation in the gospels.

Further Lukan characterisation of Zechariah is evident in verses 8 and 9 where a veiled attack on chief priestly practices is evident. In verse 9, it is reported that Zechariah is chosen by lot to offer incense in the inner sanctuary of the Temple. Historically, a priest who got this opportunity was deemed very fortunate and was capable of receiving miraculous joy from it (Basser 2000:826). However, Luke records that the use of the lot in Zechariah's choice for the temple service was according to the *ἔθος τῆς ἱερατείας*, 'the custom of the priesthood' (Lk 1:9). The reference to the lot as 'the custom of the priesthood' demonstrates priestly adherence to the traditional practice of choosing priests for the consecration ceremony. By this time, many of the priestly customs instituted in the Torah were either no longer in practice or had been seriously compromised. L.L. Grabbe in his study of Judaic religion in the Second Temple demonstrates that although, upon his takeover of Judea, Herod left the temple cult intact, he introduced changes that significantly undermined the efficacy of the priestly functions. Firstly, he abolished the *συνέδριον* or significantly emasculated it, and secondly, he undermined the moral and spiritual authority of the High Priestly office through frequent and eccentric appointments (Grabbe 2000:144). Until the time of Herod, the *ἔθος τῆς ἱερατείας* for the appointment of the High Priest had either been hereditary or from brother to brother. However, by this time, Herod and later Roman governors appointed the High Priest. This significantly compromised the moral and spiritual integrity of the priesthood. Therefore, the continued use of the lot as *ἔθος τῆς ἱερατείας* demonstrated how, for Luke, the ordinary priestly practices continued to be legitimately carried out within the temple cult.

The above devotion and commitment to the cult within the ordinary priestly class is also conspicuous in the way Luke presents Zechariah as a worshipper and a prayerful priest (vv. 10–13). It is while he is performing priestly functions, which according to Marshall (1978:54) was at the geographical centre of Jewish piety, that Zechariah experiences divine visitation. This divine visitation had both covenantal and personal implications. At a covenantal level, it fulfilled Jewish national aspirations in which the son of Zechariah will prepare the nation for the coming of the Messiah. At a personal level, it conveyed the good news of an impending son as an answer to a personal prayer (v. 13). While priestly duties required constant priestly mediatory prayers, the above reference implies a prayerful lifestyle that went beyond normal priestly duties. Zechariah has been praying for a child. In Luke's story world, these two aspects of Zechariah's divine visitation demonstrated that despite the political interference of chief priestly practices, even during the time of Jesus, the temple cult remained relevant as a conduit of

both corporate and personal blessings. Although purity rites kept the majority of the population away from the temple, in Luke's perspective, popular spirituality revolved around the temple. Luke's depiction in the temple of pious Jews such as Simeon and Anna (Lk 2:27–37), sinners such as tax collectors (Lk 18:9–14) and widows (21:1–4) demonstrates the centrality of the temple personal spirituality. In addition, the visitation and its contents placed the birth of Christianity right into the heart of Judaism. This explains why, at its inception, Christianity and Judaism could not easily be explained apart. However, some scholars argue that Zechariah's unbelief in the divine promise and his subsequent speechlessness (vv. 19–20) taints his rather bright image (Nolland 1989:32). This scholarly understanding is incorrect in two ways. Firstly, given the recoded character and profession of Zechariah, to call his reaction to the angel's message as unbelief is an overstatement. His reaction rather represents an instance of momentary human confusion and inability to process and comprehend the impossible against the general scheme of things. Secondly, it fails to understand Zechariah's experience from the larger canonical context of God's dealings with key figures in the history of Israel. It can be argued that Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Gideon and Mary, the mother of Jesus, also questioned the divine oracle without being punished (Gn 17:17; Ex 4:1–9; Jdg 6:36–40; Lk 1:34). In fact, their supposed doubts demonstrated how God's grace works despite human failure to grasp the full import of divine purposes. Understood from the story's successful conclusion at the child's naming (v. 63), it is possible to postulate that Zechariah's speechlessness was a reassuring sign of the fulfilment of the divine promise. It was also a sign to those waiting outside that Zechariah has had a divine visitation and, therefore, demonstrated the diversity with which God deals with various individuals.

Zechariah's prayerful and worshipping lifestyle is taken to another level in the Benedictus and its succeeding verses (vv. 57–80). Two things happen in this section. Firstly, through other characters, Luke brings the promises of verses 5–23 to their dramatic fulfilment. Secondly, Luke lets Zechariah describe himself as a worshipper whose praise of the Lord echoes the Jewish revolutionary spirit of the time. In the first place, Luke brings out how other characters in the story, namely, Zechariah's relatives and neighbours, perceived him. In verse 58, the relatives and neighbours attribute the birth of John to *ἐμεγάλυνεν κύριος τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ*, [the magnification of the Lord's mercy on Elizabeth]. This 'magnification of divine mercy' on the priestly family including the miraculous restoration of his speech presented Zechariah with a special status before his relatives, neighbours, and the whole region of Judea. Luke also reports that the relatives and the neighbours rejoiced with Zechariah's wife at the birth of his son. This technically brought to initial fulfilment the divine promise made to Zechariah in verse 14 that *πολλοὶ ἐπὶ τῇ γενέσει αὐτοῦ χαρήσονται* [many will rejoice at his birth] (v. 14). The relatives and neighbour's rejoicing, by implication, makes Zachariah a priestly conduit of joy, both through the immediate birth of

his son, and beyond, through the future work of his son who will lead in the preparations for the coming of the Lord (v. 17). In addition, because of his possible connection with the divine experience, Zechariah's mysterious life circumstances evoke awe or reverence (v. 65) both in the other characters around and across the hill country of Judea (v. 65). This again reinforced Zechariah's priestly status. Furthermore, the relatives and neighbours were also astonished at Zechariah's insistence in naming the child John (vv. 58–61) against the common tradition of child naming. This further characterises Zechariah as an obedient priest (Carter 1988:240). It can also be observed that beyond obedience, the naming of the child against the common tradition of naming, also characterises Zechariah as the one who sacrifices family honour in the service of God (Wilson 2015:5). He not only names the child against his heritage but also commissions him for the service of the Lord (v. 76). In this way, like Hannah, the mother of Samuel, Zechariah receives a son from the Lord, and as he had been promised, he turns the child over for service to the Lord (1 Sm 1:21–28).

Secondly, Luke presents Zechariah in prophetic and revolutionary terms (vv. 67–80). Firstly, Luke records that soon after regaining his speech, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit is a central Lucan theme and runs across Luke-Acts. Other recipients of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts are John the Baptist (1:15), Simeon (Lk 2:25), Jesus (Lk 4:1, 14), early Christians at Pentecost (Ac 2:4), and the Apostles (Ac 4:8, 31; 13:52). However, apart from baby John who is to be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (1:15), Zechariah tops the chronological list of New Testament recipients of the Holy Spirit. Although the experience of the Spirit of Yahweh had historical precedencies in the history of Israel, Zechariah's experience demonstrated that God was making a new beginning with Jesus of Nazareth. This, therefore, suggests that when the Holy Spirit's outpouring occurred at Pentecost in Acts 2, it had already been newly experienced within the priesthood in Judaism. This for Luke reinforced the fact that that despite the present Jewish unbelief, historically, the early Christian movement's foundation of power, the Holy Spirit, had its new expression in official representatives of Judaism. Such continuity in the work of the Spirit brings an interesting dynamic to the relationship between Judaism and the early Christian movement. Furthermore, after the restoration of his speech, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the first words that Zechariah spoke were to praise God (v. 64) (Carter 1988:240). As a worshipper, Zechariah recounts God's fulfilment of his plan for the salvation of Israel (v. 74) whose final objective is for God's people to worship him without fear and in holiness and righteousness through 'saving us from the hand of enemies' (v. 74). The holiness and righteousness with which the people were to worship God echoes Zechariah's righteous and blameless character (v. 6). This divine plan makes Zechariah both a priestly exemplar and stock character, and therefore, a measure to which every Jew would aspire in the coming messianic age.

However, the fact that this divine plan would be fulfilled by ἐκ χειρὸς ἐχθρῶν ῥυσθέντας, 'saving us from the hand of enemies' (v. 74) adds a revolutionary tone to Zechariah's prayer and sets him as a patriot in both a political and religious sense. The question is, who are the 'enemies of God's people' who need to be removed if it is not the hated Romans with whom the chief priestly class corroborated? Ford (1984:14) observes that Zechariah's first opening statement Εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, 'praised be the Lord, God of Israel' (v. 68) is a rare Old Testament quote only found in the Psalms (113:2–4) and in the War Scrolls from the Qumran. In view of Ford's observation, the association of Zechariah's prayer with the Qumran community gives his prayer a tinge of war cry and therefore locates him with the Jewish grass-root political and religious aspirations concretely expressed through the Qumran community. It also creates a significant contrast between Zechariah as a representative of ordinary priests and the sacerdotal priests in Jerusalem, who not only favoured the status quo but were also opposed by the Qumran community. Furthermore, apart from giving weight to the notion that John the Baptist was associated with the Qumran, Zechariah's prayer underscored the apparent tension between the elite priests and ordinary priests in the history of Israel (Schürer 1973:89; Schwartz 1990:92, 95). However, as one who is faithful to the traditions of the Old Testament faith and, who through the same, receives and responds to divine revelation, Zechariah embodies the spirit of what it means to be a model priest. As a model priest, Zechariah was both sensitive to the spiritual realities of his people and to the encumbrance that political oppression presented to the religious life of the nation.

Ordinary priests in acts

It can also be further observed that while Zechariah the priest stands as a priestly exemplar at the dawn of the gospel story, for Luke, ordinary priests continued to play this role even at the beginning of the Christian movement. It needs to be highlighted again that, like in the Third Gospel, in Acts, the chief priests and the ordinary priests are clearly differentiated. The ἀρχιερεῖς are prevalent in the early chapters of Acts (3–8, 12), where they lead in the persecution of the early Christians. Although Jewish leaders do appear at various points in Paul's missionary journeys as recorded by Luke, to stir up trouble, as the faith moves further afield, the chief priests disappear from the scene. They actively reappear later in Paul's trials (Ac 23–25). However, regarding the ordinary Jewish temple officials, the term ἱερεῖς appears twice in the Acts narrative. The first reference (Acts 4:1) places the ἱερεῖς side by side with the Sadducees and the στρατηγὸς τοῦ ἱεροῦ, 'Captain of the Temple Guards', in the arrest of Jesus' disciples. Some manuscripts read 4:1 as 'chief priests' to bring the list in line with Luke's Passion account (Lk 19:47) (Johnson 1992:76). However, most scholars rightly prefer the ἱερεῖς rendering which suggests that the ordinary priests in question would be members of the priestly course that was on duty that week (Bruce 1990:147). If these are ordinary priests, then Luke presents them as working against early Christians. However, the presence of the

Captain of the Temple Guards, who according to Bruce (p. 89) was an elite priest who ranked next to the High Priest, suggests that the ordinary priests were working under the direct charge of the chief priests. In this case, their characterisation as enemies of the early Christians can be understood within the chief priestly orders. This becomes evident in Acts 6:7 where many of the ordinary priests became obedient to the faith. As Stagg (1995:93) observes, the importance of Acts 6:7 in the structure of the book of Acts is that it closes the first major section of the book in which the Christian movement found expression within Judaism. In this case, as Johnson (1992:207) argues, the conversion of priests in 6:7 serves to stress the fact that very early in its development, the success of the Christian movement was not only among the ordinary Jewish populace but also within its leadership. In addition, Bruce and Johnson agree that many converted priests were not only socially removed from the wealthy chief priestly families but were also marginalised and disaffected from the ruling authority (Bruce 1990:123; Johnson 1992:107). It is also possible that as a result of their life of humility and commitment to the law (Sanders 1992:188), evident from Luke's depiction of the life of Zechariah, these ordinary priests were naturally drawn closer to the Christian faith. In this case, the reference to priests' conversions in Act 6:7 creates the connections between Luke 1–2 and the rest of Luke-Acts (Ravens 1995:28). It brings the characterisation of the ordinary priests in Luke-Acts full circle from the righteous and blameless priest Zechariah (Lk 1:5–25, 57–80) to the believing ordinary priests of Acts 6:7. This representation completes Luke's image of the ordinary priests in the Jewish tradition.

Concluding thoughts

In view of the above discussion, the question becomes, how would Luke's characterisation of Zechariah and the other priests, among other things, help his readers who comprised a gentile-Jewish membership? The answer to this question depends on the likely questions that bothered Luke's audience. Based on the wording of Luke's preface (vv. 1–4), it is possible to gauge some of the concerns that beleaguered both sides of Luke's audience. As Neagoe points out, for gentile Christians, it is likely that their questions related to the validity of what they had been taught against what was apparent in their everyday Christian experience (Neagoe 2002:19). Their confidence in the 'things in which they had been instructed' (Lk 1:4) was being undermined by two historical events of which they had been a part: Jewish rejection of the gospel and the Gentile's acceptance of it. They possibly asked, if those to whom God had made his promises were no longer sharing in them, while others were taking the benefits, what did that have to say about the faithfulness of God in whom they had trusted? Inversely, for the Jewish audience, the mass opposition to the gospel from their leaders and kinsmen raised the questions of the legitimacy of the Christian faith especially in its relationship with the Jewish religion. They may have asked, is the Christian faith compatible with their traditional Jewish faith as revealed in the Torah, and what was its historical relationship with the

Judaism? It needs to be pointed out, however, that by the time of Luke's writing, between 80 AD and 90 AD, the Jerusalem Temple no longer existed, and its priests had lost their original function (Brown 1977:268). However, from the spirit of the 90 CE Jamnia resolution against the Christian movement, official Jewish attitude to Christianity remained hostile (Kesichi 2007:107). Therefore, the question of Jewish leaders' attitudes and response to the Christian faith during Jesus' time would be relevant for establishing the historical relationship between Christianity and Judaism. It would help Luke's audience to rationalise the contemporary inconsistencies in their experience of the relationship between Christ-groups and synagogues. As the temple and the priesthood in Jesus' time represented official Judaism, the latter's attitude to the early Christian movement would provide a window into the historical relationship between the two religions. Therefore, Luke's characterisation of Zechariah and other ordinary priests in Acts 6:7 demonstrated that although contemporary evidence pointed to ordinary Jews and Gentile as the most ardent followers of the Jesus movement, this was not historically the case. At its inception, even the Jewish priesthood represented by the ordinary priests was part of the Christ-followers. In this case, Zechariah and the other ordinary priests represent the muted voice of Jewish ordinary priests who were absent from the controversies that make the grand narrative of the Gospels. However, they were present with and in the Christian movement both as part of its welcoming entourage in Zechariah and John in the Gospel of Luke and at its consummation with ordinary priests in the book of Acts.

Acknowledgements

Special acknowledgement goes to Professor Hellen Bond of Edinburgh University who supervised my MTh-Biblical studies project, 'Ordinary Priests in Luke-Acts' from which this article arose. I also acknowledge Le Dao Tan Bin An for reading my paper and suggesting language and grammar corrections.

Competing interests

The author declares that he or she has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him or her in writing this article.

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