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The Prophet like Moses and the Word of the Lord: Reassigning the Composite Citation in Acts 3.22–3

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Abstract

Most commentators, as well as the editors of both the NA28 and UBS5, identify Acts 3.22–3 as a composite citation of Deut 18.15–19 and Lev 23.29. Problems arise, however, when they try to explain why Luke combines these two texts. Luke’s typical practice for composite citations is to combine texts which share a common theme or otherwise mutually interpret each other, but none of the suggested connections between Deut 18.15–19 and Lev 23.29 have proven convincing. This paper demonstrates that while scholars have correctly identified Deut 18.15–19 as one of the texts cited, the text with which Luke combines it ought to be identified as Num 15.30 rather than Lev 23.29. Both Deut 18.18–19 and Num 15.30–1 describe the consequences of deliberately rejecting the ‘word of the Lord’. Correctly identifying these texts confirms Luke’s general practice in composite citations and also clarifies the function of this citation in its context in Acts 3.12–26. Using this composite citation, Peter warns those who had previously acted in ignorance against now opposing God deliberately.

Keywords: Acts 3.22–3; Deut 18.15–19; Lev 23.29; composite citations; Num 15.30–1

1. Introduction

Acts 3.22–3 contains the first of two citations of Deut 18.15–19 that Luke places on the lips of an early Christian leader.¹ However, a brief examination of the citation reveals that Luke has substantially reworked this text. Most notably, the one who disobeys the promised prophet ‘will be utterly rooted out of the people’ (ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ, 3.23), rather than held accountable by God as both the Masoretic Text (MT) and Septuagint (LXX) of Deut 18.19 indicate. The most common explanation of this phenomenon has been that Luke borrows the phrase in question from Lev 23.29.² Since Lev 23.29 seems to share nothing in common

¹ The second, spoken by Stephen, is found in Acts 7.37. This article operates on the belief that Luke’s freedom in selecting, arranging and editing his sources allows for the speeches in Acts to be treated as Lukan compositions regardless of their possible origins in actual historical events or early Christian tradition. For a helpful introduction and bibliography regarding reading the speeches in Acts as Lukan compositions, see John M. Duncan, ‘Peter, Paul, and the Progymnasmata: Traces of the Preliminary Exercises in the Mission Speeches of Acts’, *PRSt* 41 (2014) 349–50.

² Hans Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (HNT 7; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1963) 35; Gerhard Schneider, *Apostelgeschichte* (HTKNT 5; Freiburg: Herder, 1980) 316; Otto Bauernfeind, *Kommentar und Studien zur Apostelgeschichte* (WUNT 22; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980) 69; Jürgen Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (NTD 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981) 78; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (SP; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992) 70; C. K. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998) 209–10; Joseph A.

with Deut 18.15–19, the combination found in Acts 3.22–3 would appear to be largely arbitrary. In contrast to this understanding of the citation at Acts 3.22–3, I will argue that Luke combines Deut 18.15–19 not with Lev 23.29 but rather with Num 15.30–1, a related text which scholars have largely ignored in studies of Acts 3.22–3.³ Correct identification of the texts cited in these verses illumines both Luke’s method of forming composite citations and the rhetorical thrust of Peter’s speech in Acts 3.12–26.

I begin by briefly introducing Acts 3.22–3, its similarities to Deut 18.15–19 and Lev 23.29 and the method of forming composite citations demonstrated elsewhere in Luke and Acts. I then survey and critique the major proposals seeking to explain the form of the citation in Acts 3.22–3, before arguing for my own proposed solution of understanding Num 15.30 rather than Lev 23.29 as the second text cited in Acts 3.22–23. Finally, I conclude by considering the significance of this alternative identification of the texts cited in Acts 3.22–3 for the interpretation of Peter’s speech in Acts 3.12–26.

2. Overview of Acts 3.22–3

Acts 3.22–3 occurs near the end of Peter’s second major speech in Acts, his first being that made at Pentecost. As with that earlier speech, Peter explains a miraculous event (2.14–16; 3.12–13a) in terms of the power of Jesus (2.33; 3.15b–16), whom God raised from the dead (2.24, 32; 3.15) as foretold by prophets (2.25–31; 3.18, 22–4). In both cases, Peter addresses a presumably Jewish audience, blaming them for Jesus’ death (2.23, 36; 3.13b–15a) before calling them to repentance (2.28; 3.19). However, this speech also differs somewhat from the Pentecost speech in its repeated mention of prophets (3.18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25), emphasis on the audience’s privileged status (3.25–6) and at least partial mitigation of the audience’s culpability for Jesus’ death based on their having ‘acted in ignorance’ (3.17). Within the speech, the threat contained in 3.22–3 acts as something of a counterbalance to the promise that immediately precedes it in 3.19–21. Peter essentially says, ‘Repent so that you may enjoy these good things, or refuse to do so and be excluded from them.’

The citation formula at the beginning of 3.22 (Μωϋσῆς μὲν εἶπεν ὅτι) removes any doubt that this is intended as a quotation of scripture. The attribution to Moses narrows the potential sources down to the Pentateuch, while the mention of a prophet like Moses makes clear that Deut 18.15–19 is in view. However, as was mentioned in the introduction, Luke’s quotation matches no known text of Deut 18.15–19, leading most commentators to view it as a conflation of two texts, namely Deut 18.15–19 and Lev 23.29. This view is likewise reflected in the cross-references of both the NA28 and the UBS5, both of which identify Deut 18.15–19 and Lev 23.29 as the texts cited in Acts 3.22–3. One can understand

Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1998) 289; Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 178–9.

³ The only exceptions of which I am aware are Richard Bauckham, ‘The Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts’, *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives* (ed. James M. Scott; JSJSup 72; Leiden: Brill, 2001) 435–87; Kai Akagi, ‘Not the Prophet like Moses, but the One of Whom the Prophets Spoke: Deut 18:15, 18–19 in Acts 3:22 and 7:37’, *NovT* 64 (2022) 432–49. Bauckham identifies Num 15.31 as the conflated text and in a footnote asserts, ‘The connexion between Deut 18.19 and Num 15.31 is intelligible as a piece of interpretative exegesis, but the connexion between Deut 18.19 and Lev 23.29 is not exegetically intelligible’ (480). He does not, however, explain the connection between Deut 18.19 and Num 15.31. Akagi provides a very brief explanation with which I largely agree, but he quickly moves on to the focus of his article, an alternative understanding of Luke’s interpretation of Deut 18.15, 18–19. The present article offers a more thorough argument for identifying Num 15.30–1 as the text conflated with Deut 18.19 in Acts 3.22–3 and, unlike Akagi’s article, also considers the implications of this conflation for the interpretation of Peter’s speech in Acts 3.

the basis for this identification from a quick comparison of the three Lev texts in question (see Figure 1).⁴

Acts 3.22 takes over the whole of Deut 18.15, only changing the word order, shifting the second-person pronoun from the singular to the plural, including κατὰ πάντα and ὅσα ἂν λαλήσῃ from later in the passage, and adding πρὸς ὑμᾶς. Moses is still the referent of the first-person pronoun, and an assembly of YHWH worshippers is the referent of the second-person pronoun, although one could argue that in Acts Peter has his own audience in mind rather than those originally addressed by Moses.⁵ Acts 3.23, on the other hand, appears to combine the two texts from the Jewish scriptures, sandwiching εἰάν μὴ ἀκούσῃ from Deut 18.19 between πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἥτις and ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ from Lev 23.29. This effectively takes the protasis from Deut 18.19 and joins it with the apodosis from Lev 23.29. The consequence of refusing to listen to the prophet shifts from God exacting vengeance on that person (ἐγὼ ἐκδικήσω ἐξ αὐτοῦ) to that individual being utterly rooted out of the people (ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ).

Deut 18.15–19	Acts 3.22–3	Lev 23.29
<p>¹⁵ <u>προφήτην ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου ὡς ἐμέ ἀναστήσει</u> <u>κύριος ὁ θεός σου, αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε</u> ¹⁶ <u>κατὰ πάντα...</u></p> <p>¹⁹ <u>καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὃς εἰάν μὴ ἀκούσῃ ὅσα ἐὰν λαλήσῃ ὁ προφήτης ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐγὼ ἐκδικήσω ἐξ αὐτοῦ.</u></p> <p>¹⁵ <u>The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your people; you must listen to him</u></p> <p>¹⁶ <u>according to everything</u></p> <p>¹⁹ <u>And whatever person does not listen to whatever the prophet may speak in my name, I will require it from him.</u></p>	<p>²² Μωϋσῆς μὲν εἶπεν ὅτι <u>προφήτην ὑμῖν ἀναστήσει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὑμῶν ὡς ἐμέ· αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε κατὰ πάντα ὅσα ἂν λαλήσῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς.</u></p> <p>²³ ἔσται δὲ <u>πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἥτις εἰάν μὴ ἀκούσῃ τοῦ προφήτου ἐκείνου ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ.</u></p> <p>²² Moses said, ‘<u>The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your people. You must listen to him according to whatever he may speak to you.</u>’ ²³ And it will be that <u>every soul that does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people.</u>’</p>	<p>²⁹ <u>πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἥτις μὴ ταπεινωθήσεται ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ταύτῃ, ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτῆς.</u></p> <p>²⁹ <u>Every soul that does not humble itself in that day will be utterly rooted out of the people.</u></p>

Figure 1. Diagram highlighting parallels between Lev 23.29; Deut 18.15–19; and Acts 3.22–3. A solid underline indicates exact agreement between Acts and Deuteronomy. A dashed underline indicates exact agreement between Acts and Leviticus. A dotted underline indicates a minor variation.

Luke employs such composite citations throughout his work, with notable examples including Luke 4.18–19 and Acts 13.22. In most cases, the basis for the merging of such texts

⁴ I use the LXX throughout this article to help draw out the verbal parallels between Acts 3.22–3 and the passages it quotes. Differences from the MT will be noted where they are significant for my argument.

⁵ Throughout the rest of Peter’s speech, there are numerous, likely irresolvable text-critical issues surrounding confusion of the first-person plural and second-person plural pronouns. Believing the original text to employ the second person throughout, Richard Pervo (*Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009) 109 n. 51) sees an othering of the Jews in this speech, making them ‘you people’ and not including them in ‘us’. Against this view, one should note the kinship terminology used earlier in the speech (3.17).

seems to lie in the presence of a shared theme.⁶ In the case of Acts 13.22, for example, the common theme of messianism unites the seemingly disparate texts of Ps 89.20, 1 Sam 13.14 and Isa 44.28. However, the same cannot be said of Deut 18.19 and Lev 23.29. Little, if anything, appears to connect these two texts.⁷ Deut 18.19 and its context provide guidance regarding which prophets to heed, while Lev 23.29 belongs to instructions to afflict oneself and refrain from working on the Day of Atonement. It would therefore appear that Luke has departed from his typical practice and combined two entirely unrelated texts in a largely arbitrary fashion.

3. Previously Proposed Solutions

Scholars have offered four major alternatives to reading Luke's citation in this way. Perhaps the most well-known comes from Darrell Bock, who suggests that Luke combines Deut 18.15–19 and Lev 23.29 not arbitrarily but rather to communicate a theological point regarding Jesus' role in atonement. According to Bock, when Luke cites Lev 23.29 in Acts 3.23, he replaces giving heed to the atonement with giving heed to the prophet. Luke has therefore associated the prophet and atonement, thus pointing toward 'a significant implication of Jesus's death: enabling sin to be blotted out'.⁸ One may wonder, however, whether Luke would not be asking too much of his audience for them both to identify Lev 23.29 as the text being cited and then to discern this theological point from the citation. Many other LXX texts speak of someone being utterly rooted out of Israel using similar language (e.g., Gen 17.14; Exod 31.14; Lev 17.4; Num 15.30), and Lev 23.29 offers only marginally better verbal parallels with Acts 3.23. Perhaps one could identify the elimination of sin mentioned just a few verses earlier in Acts 3.18–19 as a possible thematic parallel with Lev 23.29, but such a connection would be tangential at best. The instructions for the Day of Atonement in Lev 23.26–32 concern only self-affliction and refraining from working; references to the significance of the Day of Atonement in addressing sin occur in a different context in Lev 16.1–34. Furthermore, the removal of sin in Acts 3.18–19 is connected more strongly with repentance and returning than with Christ's death. Bock's interpretation of the citation at Acts 3.22–3, though creative and interesting, is ultimately unconvincing.

A second alternative, offered by Martin Albl, resembles that of Bock but attributes the creative theological work not to Luke but rather to his source. Albl theorises that Luke relied on a *testimonia* collection which included Deut 18.15–19; Lev 23.29; and Gen 22.18, all of which Peter quotes in this speech (Acts 3.22–5).⁹ He bases his argument on (1) an assertion that Luke does not typically conflate passages, (2) the widespread use of Deut 18.15–19 as a messianic text, (3) the supposedly un-Lukan inclusion of Moses among the prophets in Acts 3.21–4, and (4) the combination of the Day of Atonement (Lev 23), the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22) and the crucifixion of Christ in *Barnabas* 7. By positing such a *testimonia* collection, Albl addresses the primary objection to Bock's proposal, namely that the citation of Lev 23.29 in Acts 3.23 is not sufficiently clear to communicate a theological message to the

⁶ Stanley E. Porter, 'Composite Citations in Luke-Acts', *New Testament Uses* (ed. Sean A. Adams and Seth M. Ehorn; vol. 2; *Composite Citations in Antiquity*; LNTS 593; London: T & T Clark, 2016) 62–93.

⁷ Pace Porter, 'Composite Citations in Luke-Acts', 64. Lev 23.29 does not in any way refer to 'God raising up a prophet that is to be heeded.'

⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 179.

⁹ Martin C. Albl, *And Scripture Cannot Be Broken: The Form and Function of the Early Christian Testimonia Collections* (NovTSup 96; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 191–5. Earlier proponents of *testimonia* as Luke's source for this citation include Traugott Holtz, *Untersuchungen über die alttestamentlichen Zitate bei Lukas* (TU 104; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1968) 74; Robert Hodgson Jr., 'The Testimony Hypothesis', *JBL* 98 (1979) 361–78, esp. 373–4; Richard J. Dillon, 'The Prophecy of Christ and His Witnesses According to the Discourses of Acts', *NTS* 32 (1986) 544–56.

reader. Presumably, the *testimonia* collection would have included more complete citations, which would enable readers to accurately identify the texts involved and thus discern the theological message communicated through combining them. Luke then would conflate Deut 18.15–19 and Lev 23.29 not to make a theological point but rather merely because the two texts appear together in the *testimonia* collection from which he was working. Howard Marshall, however, delivers a forceful rebuttal to Albl's suggestion, responding to each point of his argument: '(1) composite passages are found elsewhere (Luke 4:18–19); (2) the evidence shows parallels for the use of Deut. 18, but not for this particular combination of passages; (3) the concept of Moses as a prophet arises out of the citation itself; (4) *Barn.* 7:3 does not allude to Deut. 18'.¹⁰ In short, there is no solid evidence for the existence of the *testimonia* collection that Albl posits, rendering his proposal largely speculative.

The remaining major alternatives differ from those of both Bock and Albl in rejecting a specific citation of Lev 23.29 in Acts 3.23. In the case of the interpretation offered by Jan de Waard, this includes entirely abandoning the idea of a composite citation and suggesting instead that Luke quotes a version of Deut 18.18–19 resembling that found in 4QTestimonia 5–8.¹¹ De Waard notes the presence of הנבי in 4QTest 7, which is absent from the MT of Deut 18.19 but possibly reflected in Luke's τοῦ προφήτου ἐκείνου of Acts 3.23. More importantly, he draws special attention to the last two words of Deut 18.19 as found in 4QTest 8: אדרוש מעמו. This differs from the MT only in the inclusion of a *waw* in אדרוש. Noting that *waw* and *yodh* in the Qumran script are often indistinguishable, de Waard theorises that a translator could plausibly misread the phrase as אורישי מעמו.¹² אורישי is a *hiphil* of ירש, which the LXX/OG frequently translates with ἐξολεθρεύω (e.g. Deut 4.38; Josh 14.12; 1 Kgs 20.26; 2 Chr 20.7). As for מעמו, revocalisation of the masoretic מַעְמוּ would explain a Greek translation reading ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ. These two together would seem to account for the presence of ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ in Acts 3.23. Rather than incorporating an unrelated passage, Luke was simply using a version of Deut 18.19 with a *Vorlage* resembling 4QTest 5–8.¹³

Intriguing as de Waard's suggestion may be, close attention to the use of the *hiphil* of ירש renders it implausible. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the *hiphil* of ירש is never used to indicate removal from God's people, which instead is consistently communicated using the *niphal* of ברת, another verb which the LXX/OG commonly translates with ἐξολεθρεύω (e.g., Gen 17.14; Exod 31.14; Lev 17.4; Num 15.30). Indeed, apart from a few highly ambiguous instances (1 Sam 2.7; Job 13.26; 20.15), the *hiphil* of ירש never describes any kind of individual punishment. It is used almost exclusively in the context of God or Israel driving out the Canaanites from the land God promised to Israel (e.g., Num 32.21; Deut 18.12; Judg 1.19; 1 Kgs 14.24; Ps 44.2; 2 Chr 20.7). A scribe or translator familiar with Hebrew would therefore

¹⁰ I. Howard Marshall, 'Acts', in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G.K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 548.

¹¹ Jan de Waard, *A Comparative Study of the Old Testament Text in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the New Testament* (STDJ 4; Leiden: Brill, 1965) 21–4.

¹² Note that a similar confusion between ירש and דרש appears to have occurred in the translation of Amos 9.12. In the LXX/OG, forms of ἐκζητέω most frequently translate דרש, but Amos 9.12 features the only case in which a form of ἐκζητέω appears in place of ירש. The most likely explanation is that the ירשו of the MT was at some point 'misread' as ידרשו, yielding the translation ἐκζητήσωσιν. On whether this was a genuine misreading or a more deliberate 'alternate reading', see the discussion in W. E. Glenny, 'Gentiles, Eschatology, And Messianism In LXX-Amos', in his *Finding Meaning in the Text: Translation Technique and Theology in the Septuagint of Amos* (SVT 126; Leiden: Brill, 2009) 201–40, esp. 224–8.

¹³ Though scholars have tended to assume that Luke worked exclusively with the LXX/OG, see Kai Akagi, 'Luke 1:49 and the Form of Isaiah in Luke: An Overlooked Allusion and the Problem of an Assumed LXX Text', *JBL* 138 (2019) 183–201. Akagi works only with Lukan citations of Isaiah, but he concludes with a general call for greater openness to the possibility of Luke using forms of the text different from those found in the LXX/OG.

understand that the *hiphil* of *וירש* does not fit in the context of Deut 18.15–19 and would be unlikely to misread *מַעֲמוֹ מִדְּרוֹשׁ מַעֲמוֹ* of 4QTest in the way de Waard suggests. Perhaps a translator with a relatively poor grasp of Hebrew could make such a mistake, but additional alternatives ought to be considered to see if a more plausible explanation for the quotation at Acts 3.22–3 can be found.

Leviticus 23.29 may be the LXX/OG text containing the strongest verbal parallels with Acts 3.23, but it is far from the only one including the conceptual parallel of destruction from God's people as a result of disobedience. The final major alternative, represented by both Craig Keener and Dulcinea Boesenberg, argues that all texts with this conceptual parallel, not only Lev 23.29, contribute to Luke's incorporation of *ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ* into his quotation of Deut 18.19.¹⁴ After mentioning the greater specificity of 'utter rooting out from the people' (*ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ*) in comparison to the rather vague punishment originally found in Deut 18.19, Boesenberg provides a list of thirteen offences for which the Mosaic law prescribed destruction from the people. Examples include not being circumcised on the eighth day (Gen 17.14), sacrificing to another god (Exod 22.20), failing to observe the Day of Atonement (Lev 23.29) and intentionally sinning (Num 15.30). Being cut off from the people is, according to Boesenberg, a common punishment for failing to do what the law requires.¹⁵ She then provides two possible ways of reasoning that could produce the text found in Acts 3.22–3. First, the text could result from an application of the rabbinic principle of *qal va-homer* (light and heavy): 'if a person is cut off from the people for not observing the law of Moses, then all the more should this happen to one who does not listen to the prophet like Moses'.¹⁶ Second, the previous verse of Deuteronomy, in which God promises to put his own words in the mouth of the prophet (Deut 18.18), could be in the background. Boesenberg concludes, 'Whoever does not listen to the prophet like Moses thus ignores the very words of God, and presumably therefore threatens his or her place in the people Israel.'¹⁷

Keener differs only slightly from Boesenberg. Providing a list of offences similar to that found in Boesenberg, Keener helpfully points out the way in which Num 15.30 subsumes all of these transgressions when it identifies exclusion from the people as the punishment for 'any deliberate rebellion against the Lord'.¹⁸ Keener concludes, 'Peter's speech may thus allude to the language of just punishment for any act of rebellion against the Lord.'¹⁹

4. Num 15.30–I in Acts 3.23

Neither Keener nor Boesenberg considers the literary context of Num 15.30, which actually holds the key to explaining how Luke can combine this text with Deut 18.15–19. In Num 15.22–31, God instructs Moses regarding the consequences of unintentional and intentional sins. If the whole congregation sins unintentionally (*ἄκουσίως*), the priest is to perform a series of offerings including a sin offering, thus making atonement and securing forgiveness of the unintentional sin (15.22–6). If an individual sins unintentionally, he or she is also to

¹⁴ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012) 2:2:1116–17; Dulcinea Boesenberg, 'Negotiating Identity: The Jewishness of the Way in Acts', *Religion and Identity* (ed. Ronald A. Simkins and Thomas M. Kelly; Journal of Religion & Society Supplement 13; Omaha: Creighton University, 2016) 62–6.

¹⁵ Boesenberg, 'Negotiating Identity', 65.

¹⁶ Boesenberg, 'Negotiating Identity', 65–6.

¹⁷ Boesenberg, 'Negotiating Identity', 66.

¹⁸ Keener, *Acts*, 2:1116.

¹⁹ Keener, *Acts*, 2:1116. Richard B. Hays defends a similar position in *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016) 220.

present a sin offering, by which the priest shall make atonement and the person will be forgiven (15.27–9). Intentional sins, however, are treated differently:

καὶ ψυχὴ, ἣτις ποιήσει ἐν χειρὶ ὑπερηφανίας ἀπὸ τῶν αὐτοχθόνων ἢ ἀπὸ τῶν προσηλύτων, τὸν θεὸν οὗτος παροξύνει· ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἡ ψυχὴ ἐκείνη ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτῆς, ὅτι τὸ ῥῆμα κυρίου ἐφάυλισεν καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ διεσκέδασεν, ἐκτρίψει ἐκτριβήσεται ἡ ψυχὴ ἐκείνη, ἢ ἀμαρτία αὐτῆς ἐν αὐτῇ.

And the soul that shall act highhandedly (lit. ‘with a hand of arrogance’) whether from the native or from the proselytes, this one provokes God. That soul is to be utterly rooted out of its people, because it has despised the word of the Lord and rejected his commandments. That soul is to be utterly wiped out (lit. ‘wiped out with a wiping’); its sin is in it. (Num 15.30–1 LXX, translation mine)

In light of the contrast with sinning unintentionally in the immediately preceding verses, acting highhandedly most naturally describes intentional, perhaps even flagrant, sin.²⁰ The one who acts in this way will be utterly rooted out of the people. An explanation for the severity of this punishment follows in 15.31: one who acts highhandedly has ‘despised the word of the Lord’ (τὸ ῥῆμα κυρίου ἐφάυλισεν).

This passage connects with Deut 18.15–19 through their shared emphasis on failing to heed the word of the Lord. As Boesenberg briefly mentions, the Lord puts the divine word (τὸ ῥῆμά μου) in the prophet’s mouth in Deut 18.18.²¹ In other words, the prophet speaks the word of the Lord. Those who refuse to listen to the prophet therefore despise the word of the Lord. Thus, the offence in Deut 18.18–19 is essentially the same as that found in Num 15.30–1. In both cases, the offender has despised the word of the Lord. The combination of Deut 18.15–19 and Num 15.30 therefore follows Luke’s typical practice of combining texts on the basis of shared themes.

If Deut 18.15–19 and Num 15.30–31 use different words to describe a similar offence, perhaps the same is true of the consequences threatened in each passage. At first glance, the ambiguity of the punishments mentioned in Deut 18.19 and Num 15.30 would seem to preclude any definite conclusion in this regard. In the case of God’s warning that he himself will ‘require [it] from him’ (אנכי אדרש מעמו) in Deut 18.19, God himself is clearly the ultimate agent of the punishment, but one is left wondering what precisely God will require from the offender. The Hebrew Bible provides no obvious parallels that might clarify the exact meaning of this rather vague threat. Determining the meaning of ‘cut off from among the people’ (מקרב עמה... ונכרתה) in Num 15.30 has proven even more difficult. Not only does the passive *niphal* stem mask the agent of punishment, the idea of being cut off from among the people is sufficiently vague to allow a host of interpretations. Surveying the possibilities, Jacob Milgrom mentions 1) childlessness and premature death, 2) death before the age of sixty, 3) death before the age of fifty-two, 4) eradication of descendants, 5) exclusion from the afterlife, 6) excommunication and 7) execution.²²

²⁰ This is especially clear when reading Num 15.27–31 in Greek. The phrase ποιήσει ἐν χειρὶ ὑπερηφανίας in 15.30 parallels ποιήσῃ ἀκουσίως in 15.29, which itself refers back to ἀμαρτή ἀκουσίως in 15.27.

²¹ Boesenberg, ‘Negotiating Identity’, 66.

²² Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990) 405–8. See discussions in G. F. Hasel, ‘כָּרַת’, *TDOT* 7.339–52; Philip J. Budd, *Numbers* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1984) 98; Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 180–1.

Despite – or perhaps because of – this ambiguity, clarifications of both these punishments appear in the Mishnah. For example, m. Sanh. 11.5 reads:

‘The false prophet’—he that prophesies what he has not heard and what has not been told him, his death is at the hands of men; but he that suppresses his prophecy or disregards the words of another prophet or the prophet that transgresses his own words, his death is at the hand of Heaven, for it is written, *I will require it of him*.²³

The scriptural citation at the end of this section makes abundantly clear that this text interprets Deut 18.19. Not only does it employ one of the Mishnah’s typical citation formulas (שנאמר), the phrase ‘I will require it of him’ (אנכי אדרש מעמו) appears nowhere in the Hebrew Bible except Deut 18.19. The citation is used to justify ‘death at the hand of Heaven’ for the one who disregards the words of a genuine prophet, but such a justification only works if ‘death at the hand of Heaven’ is equivalent to ‘[God] will require it of him’. The precise significance of ‘death at the hand of Heaven’ is clarified through its deliberate contrast with ‘death at the hands of men’. First, such a contrast excludes the possibility that the punishment, though originating with God himself, might be delegated to a human court. God is the sole party responsible for the punishment. Additionally, the contrast with death at the hands of men clarifies the kind of death envisioned. These are two means by which one’s earthly life might end, not a reference to some kind of eschatological judgement. Later rabbis would affirm exactly this, explicitly defining ‘death at the hand of Heaven’ as premature physical death.²⁴

The same pattern of divine, non-eschatological punishment holds true for the Mishnah’s treatment of Num 15.30. M. Keritot 1.1 lists thirty-six transgressions for which the law prescribes being cut off from the people, abbreviating this punishment as ‘extirpation’ (כרת). One of the transgressions is blaspheming (המגדף), a clear reference to the only biblical text to combine ‘blaspheming’ (מגדף) with ‘cutting off’ (כרת): Num 15.30. Although m. Keritot never defines extirpation, four other Mishnaic texts contrast extirpation with capital punishment carried out by a court.²⁵ Interestingly, only one of these texts, m. Yebam. 4.13, specifies extirpation ‘at the hands of heaven’ (בידי שמים); in the three other cases, the divine nature of extirpation emerges not from such clarification but only through the contrast with human punishments. This understanding of extirpation as a divine punishment therefore appears to have been generally assumed, such that it did not need to be clarified or supported with argument, at least by the time of the Mishnah’s completion in the early third century. Additionally, the reference to extirpation ‘at the hands of heaven’ in m. Yebam. 4.13 is attributed to Simeon of Teman, who was active from about 80 to 120 CE, thus placing this interpretation of extirpation in the same era as the composition of Acts.²⁶

This evidence from the Mishnah demonstrates that the punishments prescribed in Deut 18.19 and Num 15.30, though expressed in different vocabulary, were seen as substantially similar or even the same in early Judaism.²⁷ If Luke (or his source) followed this interpretive tradition, then this would further explain how these two texts came to be spliced together in

²³ All quotations of the Mishnah are taken from *The Mishnah* (trans. Herbert Danby; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933). Emphasis in the original.

²⁴ b. Sanh. 89a–b.

²⁵ m. Meg. 1.5; m. Yebam. 4.13; m. Ketub. 3.1; m. Šebu. 1.6.

²⁶ Danby, *The Mishnah*, 799.

²⁷ A similar pattern appears at Qumran. There, both punishments appear to have been understood as eschatological and divine (4QTest 5–8; 1QS 2.16; CD 20.26; and 4QpPs^a 2.4; 3.12; 4.18). The eschatological focus thus differs from the interpretation of these texts found in the Mishnah, but it is still the case that within a given community the punishments found in Deut 18.19 and Num 15.30 are read as meaning the same thing just in different words.

Acts 3.22–3.²⁸ Not only do they describe essentially the same offence in different language, they also use equally divergent language to describe the same punishment.

In addition to these parallels between Deut 18.15–19 and Num 15.30–1, there are also echoes of the immediate literary context of Num 15.30 in Peter's speech in Acts.²⁹ The most significant of these are the references to unintentional sin that precede both Num 15.30 and the citation of it in Acts 3.23. In both cases, the unintentionality of the sin appears to play a mitigating role. In Num 15.22–9, unintentional sins are addressed through sacrifice, while the intentional sins of 15.30–1 lead to severe punishment. The mitigating role of unintentionality comes out especially clearly in 15.26, which states that a sin shall be forgiven 'because for all the people it is unintentional' (ἀφεθήσεται... ὅτι παντὶ τῷ λαῷ ἀκούσιον). In Peter's speech, the reference to unintentionality comes in Acts 3.17. Having just harshly accused his audience of denying, rejecting and killing Jesus (3.13–15), he suddenly takes a more conciliatory tone, addressing them as 'brother and sisters' (ἀδελφοί) and attributing their actions to 'ignorance' (ἄγνοιαν, 3.17). Again, the unintentional nature of their sin plays a mitigating role, leading to an invitation to repent so that their sins may be wiped away (3.19).³⁰

The mention of proselytes in the LXX of Num 15.30, and especially in Num 15.29, also fits nicely with the theme of gentile inclusion found throughout Acts, including in Peter's speeches. Within the narrative of Acts, the idea that salvation might extend to gentiles does not occur to Peter until the Cornelius episode of Acts 10. Nevertheless, the Peter of Acts 2–3 has a knack for citing scriptural texts that hint at the inclusion of the gentiles. Near the beginning of his Pentecost speech, Peter quotes Joel 3.1–5, including its promise that God will pour out his Spirit 'on all flesh' (ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα, Acts 2.17). In addition to the citation of Deut 18.15–19 and Num 15.30 in Acts 3.22–3, Peter's speech in Acts 3 contains one more explicit citation of scripture, this one from Gen 22.18 promising that 'all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (Acts 3.25). The LXX of Num 15.30 mentions proselytes, but even more than that, the immediately preceding verse asserts that there is to be one law for both the native Israelite and the proselyte (τῷ ἐγγχωρίῳ ἐν νόμοις Ἰσραὴλ καὶ τῷ προσηλύτῳ τῷ προσκειμένῳ ἐν αὐτοῖς, νόμος εἷς ἔσται αὐτοῖς). Though νόμος always refers to the Mosaic law in Luke and Acts (e.g., Luke 10.26; 16.16; Acts 13.15; 28.23), perhaps a member of Luke's audience, capable of calling the context of Num 15.30 to mind when hearing it cited in Acts 3.23, would find in the νόμος εἷς of Num 15.29 a reference to a singular salvific principle, namely faith in Jesus, valid for Jew and gentile.³¹

²⁸ It is worth noting, however, that the interpretation of 'cut off from its people' evidenced in Acts 3.23 does not agree entirely with that found in the Mishnah. The rewards stemming from repentance that are mentioned in Acts 3.19–21 are given by God at the end of the age (see Albrecht Oerke, 'ἀποκαθίστημι, ἀποκατάστασις,' *TDNT* 1:387–93; *pace* Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 228). Since the punishment mentioned in 3.23 results from the opposite action of persistent rejection, the punishment envisioned is also most likely divine and eschatological. In both Acts 3.23 and in the Mishnah, being 'cut off from one's people' is a divine rather than human punishment, but the two differ on whether this refers to premature death or an eschatological occurrence.

²⁹ I am indebted to the anonymous reviewer of this article for bringing the echoes mentioned in this paragraph and the next to my attention.

³⁰ The 'ignorance' mentioned in Acts 3.17 also connects well with Jesus' teaching on the unpardonable sin in Luke 12.10, as can be seen in François Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27* (trans. Christine M. Thomas; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013) 185. Rejection of Jesus during his earthly ministry was pardonable based on people's ignorance of his true identity. Rejection of the apostolic message with its verifying miracles, on the other hand, constituted wilful 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit' that would not be simply overlooked.

³¹ Going further afield from Num 15.30, one could perhaps posit fainter echoes of Num 14–16 in the broader context of Acts 3–4. Both include references to the people failing to recognise the significance of a miracle (Num 14.11, 40–5; Acts 3.12) and an episode in which rebellious leaders oppose the speaker of the previous speech (Num 16.1ff.; Acts 4.1ff.). At the same time, episodes like these appear throughout the Jewish scriptures (e.g., Exod 16.27–30; Jer

Against this understanding of the citations in Acts 3.22–3, one might level the same criticism that has already been directed at Bock’s suggestion: most members of Luke’s audience would have been unable to identify the specific texts being cited and would thus miss the author’s intended point. There is, however, an important difference between my understanding of the function of the texts cited in Acts 3.22–3 and the interpretation put forward by Bock. In Bock’s case, one must know the original literary context of the cited texts in order to discern the theological point being communicated. Anyone unaware that part of the citation comes from a text about the Day of Atonement will entirely miss Luke’s supposed point of connecting the prophet like Moses, atonement and Jesus. My proposal regarding the citation of Num 15.30 does not function in this way. Scripturally illiterate readers or auditors would likely fail to recognise that the words of Acts 3.23 are not found in Deut 18.15–19, and thus would not even realise that a second text is being cited. Since, however, Num 15.30–1 and Deut 18.15–19 make largely the same point about the consequences of rejecting the word of the Lord, even readers who do not recognise the exact allusion will be able to grasp the main point of Acts 3.22–3 thanks to the explicit citation of Deut 18.15–19. On the other hand, those with enough scriptural knowledge to recognise that Acts 3.22–3 inexactly cites Deut 18.15–19 will also be those most likely to have sufficient familiarity with Num 15.30–1 to identify its influence. Accurate identification of this second text yields additional insights into the logic of Acts 3.17–26 (see next section), but it is not the kind of essential interpretive key that it is in Bock’s reading.

An additional objection could be raised on the basis of verbal parallels. Both Lev 23.29 and Num 15.30 contain ψυχὴ ἥτις... ἐξολεθρευθήσεται (...) ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ, but only Lev 23.29 includes a πᾶσα immediately preceding ψυχὴ, as does Acts 3.23. If one is only counting words, then Acts 3.23 resembles Lev 23.29 more closely than Num 15.30. At the same time, conceptual parallels ought to be weighed along with verbal parallels when discerning which texts an author uses. In my judgement, the conceptual parallel between not listening to the prophet in Acts 3.23 and despising the word of the Lord in Num 15.30–1 outweighs the significance of a single additional word of verbal parallelism in Lev 23.29. Furthermore, Luke may have even worked from a version of Num 15.30 that contained πᾶσα. Although πᾶσα ψυχὴ in the LXX/OG typically renders either כָּל הַנֶּפֶשׁ or כָּל הַנֶּפֶשׁ, in a few cases one finds it in place of הַנֶּפֶשׁ or even just נֶפֶשׁ (Gen 12.5; Num 6.6; Jer 31.25a). In these cases, πᾶσα accurately translates a possible nuance of phrases such as הַנֶּפֶשׁ or הַאִישׁ, just as many English translations render הַנֶּפֶשׁ in Num 15.30 with ‘whoever’ or ‘anyone’. Luke’s πᾶσα ψυχὴ in Acts 3.23 may therefore reflect הַנֶּפֶשׁ from Num 15.30. Whether on the basis of weightier conceptual parallels or a Greek translation of Num 15.30 differing from the LXX, an objection based on verbal parallelism alone does not stand.

At this point, it is worth revisiting Boesenberg’s and Keener’s suggestion that Acts 3.23 in some way recalls all texts that contain some variation of ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ. There is substantial merit to this interpretation, especially with respect to how an audience with limited biblical literacy might receive Acts 3.23 when hearing it performed.³² Nevertheless, Acts 3.22–3 resonates with Num 15.30–1 in such a way so as to justify regarding it as a composite citation, specifically of Deut 18.15–19 and this text. First, there is the matter of verbal parallelism. As I just argued, verbal parallelism does not count for everything. That does not mean, however, that it counts for nothing. Fourteen texts contain variations of ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ (Gen 17.14; Exod 12.15, 19; 30.33; 31.14; Lev 17.4, 9; 18.29; 19.8; 20.18; 23.29; Num 9.13; 15.30; 19.20), but only Lev 23.29 and Num 15.30

36.20–6), so more work would need to be done to demonstrate that Acts 3–4 specifically echoes the Num 14–16 episodes and that recognition of such echoes contributes to the interpretation of Acts 3–4.

³² On the implications of performance criticism for intertextual studies, see Kelly R. Iverson, *Performing Early Christian Literature: Audience Experience and Interpretation of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) 165–80.

contain the specific combination of ψυχή ἤτις, ἐξολεθρευθήσεται and ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ as Acts 3.23 does. This tips the scales toward understanding Acts 3.23 as citing one or both of these two texts.

Conceptual parallels ought also to be weighed when considering whether Acts 3.23 cites Num 15.30 specifically or alludes more generally to numerous texts containing a similar phrase. First, there is the significant conceptual parallel of despising the word of the Lord in both Deut 18.15–19 and Num 15.30–1. To my knowledge, no such conceptual parallels to Deut 18.15–19 have been proposed for any of the other LXX texts containing variations of ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ. Since Luke’s *modus operandi* in composite citations is to combine texts that share a common theme, this argues strongly that the composite citation at Acts 3.22–3 combines Deut 18.15–19 with Num 15.30 specifically rather than with all texts containing variations of ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ. Perhaps even more importantly, there is the significant parallel between Peter’s speech in Acts 3.12–26 and the immediate literary context of Num 15.30, both of which address intentional and unintentional sins. Peter’s speech thus takes up an important theme from the immediate literary context of Num 15.30 in a way that it does not for any of the other texts containing variations of ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ. For all these reasons, it is best to describe Acts 3.22–3 as a composite citation of Deut 18.15–19 and Num 15.30 specifically.

It is now appropriate to diagram Acts 3.22–3 and its source texts once more, this time with Num 15.30–1 in place of Lev 23.29 (Figure 2). In this diagram, a solid underline indicates exact agreement between Acts and Deuteronomy, a dashed underline indicates exact agreement between Acts and Numbers, a dotted underline indicates a minor variation and italics indicate a conceptual parallel.

Deut 18.15–19	Acts 3.22–3	Num 15.30–1a
<p><i><u>15 προφήτην ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου ὡς ἐμέ ἀναστήσει σοι κύριος ὁ θεός σου, αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε</u> <u>16 κατὰ πάντα...</u> ¹⁸...καὶ δώσω τὸ ῥῆμά μου ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ, καὶ λαλήσει αὐτοῖς καθότι ἂν ἐντείλωμαι αὐτῷ. ¹⁹ καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὃς ἐὰν μὴ ἀκούσῃ ὅσα ἐὰν λαλήσῃ ὁ προφήτης ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐγὼ ἐκδικήσω ἐξ αὐτοῦ.</i></p> <p><u>15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your people; you must listen to him</u> <u>16 according to everything...</u> ¹⁸...and I will put my word in his mouth, and he will speak to you as I command him. ¹⁹ And whatever person <u>does not listen to whatever the prophet may speak in my name</u>, I will require it from him.</p>	<p><i><u>22</u> Μωϋσῆς μὲν εἶπεν ὅτι <u>προφήτην ὑμῖν ἀναστήσει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὑμῶν ὡς ἐμέ· αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε κατὰ πάντα ὅσα ἂν λαλήσῃ</u> πρὸς ὑμᾶς. ²³ ἔσται δὲ πᾶσα ψυχή ἣτις ἐὰν μὴ ἀκούσῃ τοῦ προφήτου ἐκείνου ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ.</i></p> <p><u>22</u> Moses said, “<u>The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your people. You must listen to him according to whatever he may speak to you.</u> ²³ And it will be that every <u>soul that does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people.</u>”</p>	<p><i>³⁰ καὶ ψυχή, ἣτις ποιήσει ἐν χειρὶ ὑπερηφανίας ἀπὸ τῶν αὐτοχθόνων ἢ ἀπὸ τῶν προσηλύτων, τὸν θεόν οὗτος παροξύνει· ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἡ ψυχή ἐκείνη ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτῆς, ³¹ ὅτι τὸ ῥῆμα κυρίου ἐφάυλισεν καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ διεσκέδασεν...</i></p> <p>³⁰ And the <u>soul that</u> acts with a hand of arrogance, from among the native born or the proselytes, his one provokes God. That soul <u>will be utterly rooted out of its people,</u> ³¹ for it has despised the word of the Lord and rejected his commandments...</p>

Figure 2. Diagram highlighting parallels between Num 15.30–1; Deut 18.15–19; and Acts 3.22–3. A solid underline indicates exact agreement between Acts and Deuteronomy, a dashed underline indicates exact agreement between Acts and Numbers, a dotted underline indicates a minor variation and italics indicate a conceptual parallel.

5. Peter's Speech in Light of This Composite Citation

Audiences, ancient and modern, can understand the broad contours of the account of Peter's speech in Acts 3.12–26 without needing specifically to identify Num 15.30–1 as the text with which Deut 18.15–19 is combined. If the relative absence of references to Num 15.30–1 in commentaries on this passage in Acts is any indication, most audiences have been doing exactly that, if they have been understanding Peter's speech at all. Interpreting Peter's speech in light of Num 15.30–1 can, however, shed light on an important aspect of its logic that has often been ignored.

In his speech, Peter accuses his audience of denying, rejecting and killing Jesus (Acts 3.13–15). Their actions, however, had been performed in ignorance (ἄγνοια, 3.17). In the language of Num 15.22–31, their sin was unintentional and thus could be addressed through the proper sacrifices, even if Peter does not mention those. Now, though, the healing of the lame man and Peter's interpretation of that healing as evidence for Jesus' status as God's Messiah have changed the situation for Peter's audience. Continuing to reject Jesus now would imply a wilful rejection of the word of God spoken through this proven prophet (Deut 18.15–19). Such persistent rejection could no longer be considered an unintentional sin, but rather could only be regarded as sinning 'with a high hand', punishable by being cut off from the people (Acts 3.23; Num 15.30). By calling to mind the prescribed punishment for wilful sinning immediately after having excused his audience's earlier sin on the grounds of ignorance, Peter indicates why repentance is still possible and now more necessary than ever.

Identifying Lev 23.29 as the text cited in Acts 3.23 necessitates exegetical acrobatics to explain how the Day of Atonement relates to the 'prophet like Moses' of Deut 18.15–19, appeals to a hypothetical *testimonia* collection or the admission that Luke combined these texts arbitrarily. In contrast to this, referencing Num 15.30–1 in this context makes sense both as an interpretation of the offence and punishment found in Deut 18.15–19 and as an explanation for why formerly rejecting Jesus out of ignorance is excused but refusing him now will elicit the severest sanction found in the Jewish scriptures. It also paints a particular picture of how at least one early Christian dealt with the question of what would happen to those who rejected their message about Jesus. When trying to discern the fate of those who rejected the gospel even when faced with what they considered abundant evidence, Luke (or Peter, or some other source behind Acts 3.22–3) did not resort to arbitrarily chosen invectives. Nor did they simply scan their scriptures and copy the punishment prescribed for the most grievous sins. Instead, they found in their scriptures a text that seemed to warn expressly against refusing to listen to Jesus, the prophet foretold by prophets (Deut 18.15–19), and then interpreted that text in light of another that shared its theme of rejecting the word of the Lord (Num 15.30–1). The exact methods that produced it may have differed from those of modern biblical scholars and theologians, but the citation at Acts 3.22–3 attests to the work of a serious exegete who sought in their scriptures answers to the pressing questions of their day.

Competing interests. The author declares none.