

Sharing Possessions in Earliest Christian Communities An Exegetical Sketch of Acts 2:44-47; 4:32–5:11; 6:1-6

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This paper outlines my reading of the sharing of possessions in the early chapters of Acts in conversation with wider scholarship. I have published on this topic, and have drafted commentary on the key passages,¹ so *caveat emptor!* I am also drawing on the work of my student Dr Fiona Gregson, for she has sharpened and clarified my thinking in a number of important ways.²

I shall focus on four major topics: first (and foremost), the major themes in the key passages—what Luke³ is saying about the earliest believers' practices;⁴ secondly, the possible cultural and religious backgrounds which have been proposed for understanding these practices, both Jewish and Graeco-Roman; thirdly, the historical question of what the earliest believers did and how long it lasted; and finally, I shall locate these practices in Luke's wider understanding of possessions and wealth in order to assess why Luke reports these stories, and what Luke is advocating by including them.

The major themes—what is Luke saying?

The three key passages in Acts are: 2:44-47; 4:32–5:11; and 6:1-6. Each has been read in different ways by scholars, and each presents intriguing questions of exegesis.

2:44-47

⁴⁴ All those who had come to believe were together and they used to hold everything as common; ⁴⁵ they used to sell their possessions and belongings and distribute the proceeds to all, as anyone had need.

⁴⁶ Day by day, spending much time together in the temple and breaking

¹ Steve Walton, 'Primitive Communism in Acts? Does Acts Present the Community of Goods (2:44-45; 4:32-35) as Mistaken?', *EvQ* 80 (2008): 99-111. The commentary will be in the Word Biblical Commentary on Acts, and much of this paper draws on the research for that work.

² Fiona J. Robertson Gregson, *Everything in Common? The Theology and Practice of the Sharing of Possessions in Community in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), esp. chs 3–4.

³ I enter the usual caveat, that in this paper I am making no assumption about the identity of the author of Acts; I use 'Luke' by convention to denote that person.

⁴ For a survey of other readings of the passages, see Walton, 'Communism,' esp. 99-102.

bread in homes, they used to share food with joy and singleness of heart,
⁴⁷ praising God and having favour with the whole people.⁵

This passage and 4:32-35 have a ‘summary’ character, marked by imperfects which signal habitual activities.⁶ Accordingly, I have often translated them using ‘used to’. Here Luke presents three features relevant to our enquiry.

First, the believers ‘used to hold everything in common’ (εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινά), a phrase which we shall see echoes Graeco-Roman writings about ideal communities.⁷ This is an expression of the *κοινωνία* which marked their community (v 42).⁸ Klauck notes that the passage ‘appears at first to indicate full community of goods and compulsory sale of possessions’.⁹

However, secondly, Gregson accurately observes that we should read this generalising statement through the lens of vv 44-45, for they give specifics.¹⁰ The context suggests that the imperfect verbs ἐπίπρασκον ‘used to sell’ and διεμέριζον ‘used to distribute’ have an iterative flavour, to indicate *periodic* sale and distribution, as people were in need (καθότι ἂν τις χρείαν εἶχεν, v 45), rather than a once-for-all sale of all possessions on entry into the community.¹¹ The believers’ meetings κατ’ οἶκον ‘in homes’, and Mary’s continuing possession of a large house where the believers met to pray when Peter was in prison (12:12),¹² both reinforce this picture.

Thirdly, the structure of v 46 portrays shared meals as taking place in the temple courts as well as private homes: the two forms of meeting are both denoted by participial clauses connected by τε... τε ‘both...and’, and thus both participial clauses are dependent on the main verbal phrase μετελάμβανον [imperfect] τροφῆς ‘they used to share food’.¹³ It would be relatively easy for others to join the ‘fringe’ of the

⁵ Translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

⁶ With, e.g., C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994, 1998), 1:169.

⁷ See below, p 10.

⁸ Jacques Dupont, *The Salvation of the Gentiles: Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 87, 101-2.

⁹ H.-J. Klauck, ‘Gütergemeinschaft in der klassischen Antike, in Qumran und im Neuen Testament,’ *RevQ* 41 (1982): 47-79 here 69 (my translation).

¹⁰ Gregson, *Everything*, 48.

¹¹ With Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 192; Luke T. Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* (London: SCM, 1981), 21. Johnson considers 2:44-45 to portray an absolute sharing of possessions, but notes that continuing home ownership shows the practice to be ‘less than absolute’.

¹² The size is indicated by the house having a πυλῶν ‘porch’, 12:13.

¹³ With Ulrich Wendel, *Gemeinde in Kraft: Das Gemeindeverständnis in den Summarien der Apostelgeschichte*, NTDH 20 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1998), 219-20.

believing community by joining in the meals, and thereby hearing the apostles' teaching. 'The breaking of bread' τῆ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου implies that these meals probably included eucharistic actions.¹⁴

4:32–5:11

³² The heart and soul of the group of those who had come to believe was one—not even a single person used to say that any of their possessions was their own, but all things were common for them. ³³ With great power the apostles kept giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ This was seen in that there was no-one in need among them, since those who were owners of fields or houses used to sell them and bring the proceeds of what they had sold ³⁵ and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they were distributed to each one, as anyone had need.

³⁶ Joseph (who was called Barnabas by the apostles, which means 'son of encouragement'), a Levite, a Cypriot by race, ³⁷ who owned a field, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

⁵¹ A certain man, Ananias by name, together with Sapphira his wife, sold a piece of property ² and kept back for himself some of the proceeds with his wife's full knowledge, and brought only a part, which he laid at the apostles' feet. ³ Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart so that you attempted to deceive the Holy Spirit by keeping something back for yourself from the proceeds of the field? ⁴ While the field remained yours, it remained yours to dispose of, and after it was sold, it was at your disposal, wasn't it? Why did you contrive this deed in your heart? You have not lied to human beings, but to God.' ⁵ On hearing these words, Ananias fell down and died, and great fear came upon all those who heard. ⁶ The young men immediately wrapped him up, and they carried him out and buried him.

⁷ There was an interval of about three hours, and his wife entered, not being aware of what had happened. ⁸ Peter responded to her, 'Tell me, did you sell the field for such and such price?' She said, 'Yes, for such and such price.' ⁹ Peter said to her, 'Why did you agree together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out.' ¹⁰ Immediately she fell at his feet and died. The young men entered, found her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Great fear came upon the whole assembly and all who heard these things.

As earlier, Luke gives a general principle—the unity of heart and soul in the believing community (4:32)—and then expounds it. Here, his exposition explains how

¹⁴ The phrase is only found elsewhere in Luke 24:35, and its lack of explanation suggests that it denotes a well-known action, which is most probably the breaking of bread found at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19) (with Gregson, *Everything*, 50; Douglas A. Hume, *The Early Christian Community: A Narrative Analysis of Acts 2:41-47 and 4:32-35*, WUNT 2/298 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 107-8).

the principle was carried out (vv 34-35), followed by the positive example of Barnabas (vv 36-37), and the negative example of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11).¹⁵

As before, the believers' unity does not issue in people pooling all their possessions when they join the community, but rather portrays a transformed attitude to possessions. Instead of regarding their goods as their own (*ἰδίον*), they held them loosely and were ready to give to others as need required (vv 32, 34-35). This attitude reflects biblical passages which understand everything as belonging to God, and humans as functioning as stewards or trustees of God's good gifts (e.g. Ps 24:1; Gen 1:26-28).

The apostles now receive goods donated to the community by having them laid at their feet (v 35). Luke Johnson proposes that placing something at another's feet indicates submission to that person's authority, and thus that this summary focuses on the apostles' status within the community.¹⁶ This may be so, although it is notable that other biblical passages which speak of being at another's feet are about *people* in that location, not goods (Josh 10:24; 1 Sam 25:24; Luke 8:35, 41)—a point Johnson concedes.¹⁷ Gregson suggests that the symbolism may be that the apostles stand for *the believing community as receiving the goods*.¹⁸ For the original owner to cede distribution of the goods to the apostles (or their delegates) in effect overturns the standard reciprocal expectations of patronage, whereby the giver placed the recipient under obligation.¹⁹ Chrysostom appositely observes:

To them (sc. the apostles) they left it to be the dispensers, made them the owners, that thenceforth all should be defrayed as from common, not from private, property. *This was also a help to them against vain-glory.* If this were done now, we should ire more pleasant lives, both rich and poor, nor would it be more pleasant to the poor than to the rich themselves.²⁰

¹⁵ This is a classic example of our chapter divisions separating what Luke unites.

¹⁶ Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, SP 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992), 87, 91.

¹⁷ Luke T. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, SBLDS 39 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977), 202. He proposes that possessions stand for the person, and thus indicate submission to the one at whose feet possessions are placed.

¹⁸ Gregson, *Everything*, 51.

¹⁹ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 46-47.

²⁰ Chrysostom, *Hom. Acts 11* (my italics; translation: NPNF 10); I owe the reference to Aaron J. Kuecker, 'The Spirit and the 'Other,' Satan and the 'Self': Economic Ethics as a Consequence of Identity Transformation in Luke-Acts,' in *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker and Kelly D. Liebengood (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 81-103 here 90 n 20.

Barnabas sells ‘a field’ (ἀγροῦ, v 37), a somewhat surprising possession for a Levite, for biblical law did not allocate land in Israel to Levites (Num 18:20; Deut 10:9; 12:12; Josh 14:3-4; 18:7). Nevertheless, by the first century some may have owned land (cf. Josephus, *Life* 1-5, 68-83).²¹ Barnabas’s field could also have been ancestral land in Cyprus (v 36), although Martin Hengel suggests that his family relationship with John Mark and Mary (who was known to have property in Jerusalem, 12:12), makes it more likely that the field was in Palestine, perhaps in Jerusalem.²² Barnabas is not picked out by Luke as a particularly generous donor, but rather as a ‘representative example’,²³ a man who is part of the group filled with the Spirit (4:31) and whom Luke will describe as ‘full of the Holy Spirit’ (11:24). William Shepherd nicely observes: ‘As the example of Barnabas shows, the Spirit inspires a community of goods, not a community of greed.’²⁴

The disturbing story of Ananias and Sapphira which follows hinges on their handling of property. Like Barnabas, they sell property and make a donation to the community (5:1-2). Peter’s rhetorical question to Ananias asserts, ‘after it was sold, it was at your disposal, wasn’t it?’ (v 4).²⁵ Thus up to the point of their donation Ananias and Sapphira were free to do whatever they wished with the money. Their sin is to present part of the money as if it were the whole, and thus to ‘lie to God’ (v 4) and ‘to test the Spirit of the Lord’ (v 9). By their actions they hand themselves over to the power of Satan, and lie to the Spirit who animates the believers’ common life (v 3). As Kuecker recognises, ‘their misuse of possessions is not the *cause* but the *symptom* of a more fundamental disposition which reveals Luke’s uniquely Spirit-focused understanding of identity, the “other” and possessions.’²⁶ The Spirit frees believers to regard goods as not their own, but as belonging to the Lord, and thus at his disposal to meet the needs of others. This reading of the story fits well with the picture in 4:32-35, that sale and donation of property were voluntary and occasional, rather than

²¹ Emil Schürer, Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar and Martin Goodman, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC–AD 135)*, 4 vols., revised ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973-86), 2:256 states that the biblical exclusion of Levites from owning land was ‘largely a theory’.

²² Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (London: SCM, 1997), 213.

²³ Daniel Marguerat, *Les Actes des apôtres*, 2 vols., CNT 5 (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2007, 2015), 1:164 (my translation); *contra*, e.g., Haenchen, *Acts*, 233.

²⁴ William H. Shepherd, Jr, *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts*, SBLDS 147 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1994), 172.

²⁵ The question is slanted to expect the answer ‘Yes’ by beginning with οὐχί.

²⁶ Kuecker, ‘Spirit,’ 98 (his italics).

there being a requirement that all new believers should donate all their property to the community.²⁷

6:1-6

¹ In these days, that is, when the disciples were increasing in number, grumbling arose among the Hellenists against the Hebrews because their widows kept being neglected in the daily distribution. ² So the Twelve called a meeting of the whole group of the disciples and said, 'It is not right for us to neglect God's word and serve at table. ³ Instead, brothers and sisters, look for seven men from among you who are well spoken of, full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will put them in charge of this matter; ⁴ but, as for us, we will devote ourselves to prayer and serving the word.' ⁵ This idea pleased the whole group and they selected Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶ They presented them to the apostles and they prayed and laid hands on them. ⁷ God's word continued growing and the number of disciples in Jerusalem continued to multiply, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.

This dispute also indicates sharing of possessions among the early believers through a 'daily distribution' (τῆ διακονία τῆ καθημερινῆ, v 1) to Greek-speaking widows.²⁸ The 'grumbling' (v 1) indicates that the 'Hebrews' and 'Hellenists' had regular contact, quite possibly through the regular meetings in Solomon's Portico (5:12). In that setting, interpretation of teaching given in Aramaic would be provided for those whose mother tongue was Greek. There would certainly have been bilingual members of the community who could do this, and they might act as go-betweens for the two language groups. Given the daily shared meals of the early community, in the temple and in homes,²⁹ and the requirement for people 'to serve tables' (διακονεῖν τραπέζαις, v 2) to resolve the situation, it is probable that the lack of provision for the Greek-speaking widows happened in the setting of sharing food.³⁰ This passage fills

²⁷ See p. 9 below on Capper's view that the believing community parallels the two-part novitiate of the Qumran community.

²⁸ I take the two groups to be distinguished primarily by the language they usually spoke, rather than theological differences. See Steve Walton, 'How Mighty a Minority Were the Hellenists?', in *Earliest Christian History: History, Literature, and Theology. Essays from the Tyndale Fellowship in Honor of Martin Hengel*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Jason Maston, WUNT 2/320 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 305-27.

²⁹ I understand the 'daily distribution' τῆ διακονία τῆ καθημερινῆ (v 1) to refer to these meals; see on 2:46 above, p 2.

³⁰ It is unlikely that the issue is the preparation of food by one group of widows alone, as Reta Halteman Finger, *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 260-63 claims, for it would be surprising if only widows participated in the preparation of food, and the apostles speak of *themselves* serving tables (v 2).

out the picture earlier in Acts by showing some of the issues which arose from the sharing of possessions, and it is noticeable that Luke reports this, rather than brushing it under the carpet.

Transformation of people by the Spirit

In sum, Luke's portrait of the earliest believers is of a sharing of possessions which put others' needs at the centre of their life together. The principles at work were to regard 'possessions' as belonging not to oneself, but to God, and thus to place them at the disposal of God's people as needed (4:32, 34).³¹ As we shall see, this fills out and goes beyond biblical ideals of almsgiving to people in poverty, and has echoes in the way others—both Jewish and gentile—regarded their possessions. What is new is that this readiness to share flows from the coming of the Spirit on the entire believing community, initially at Pentecost and later as others join, for the expectation of the programmatic 2:38-39 is that they, too, would receive the Spirit. Reading Luke narratively, it is noticeable that the events of 2:42-27 follow hot on the heels of the Spirit's coming at Pentecost, and those of 4:32-35 immediately after Luke narrates the Spirit coming on 'all' in response to prayer (4:29-31). The prophetic hope for a generous and compassionate 'heart of flesh' whose inclination is to fulfil God's purposes, contrasted with an unresponsive 'heart of stone', is being fulfilled (Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-28). The gift of the Spirit to *all* is transformative, and leads to holding goods lightly with an attitude of stewardship on behalf of God.³²

Cultural and religious background

A major debate in study of the early believers' sharing of possessions is the cultural and religious background against which it should be understood. The main candidates are Judaism and Graeco-Roman culture(s).

³¹ See the helpful study of ἰδιος 'one's own' in Luke-Acts in Kuecker, 'Spirit,' 84-91, showing that it is contrasted with the attitude and actions of the early believers, who gave up power over things through the Spirit's work in them, after the manner of God, who gave up 'his own' to obtain the church (Acts 20:28).

³² *Contra*, e.g., Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts*, JPTSUP 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 258, who asserts that 'there is no indication that Luke considered the diverse aspects of community life...to be the direct result of the Spirit's activity.' So also Gonzalo Haya-Prats, SJ, *Empowered Believers: The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts*, trans. Scott A. Ellington (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 167-77. For critique, see Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts*, JPTSUP 9 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 412-15.

Judaism

Acts 4:34 clearly echoes Deut 15:4 LXX in saying οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδεής τις ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς ‘for there was not a needy person among them’. ἐνδεής ‘needy’ is an NT *hapax legomenon* also found in Deut 15:4, a verse in the context of the expected septennial remission of debts (v 1), and which presents this redistribution of property as preventing long-term poverty: ‘There will, however, be no one in need among you (LXX οὐκ ἔσται ἐν σοὶ ἐνδεής), because the LORD is sure to bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a possession to occupy’ (NRSV).

As well as this echo, καρδία καὶ ψυχὴ μία ‘one heart and soul’ (4:32), a phrase expressing the believers’ unity, echoes the biblical theme of the unity of God’s people. The *Shema* (Deut 6:5) speaks of loving YHWH with heart, soul and strength—and is one of many such texts in Deuteronomy (e.g. 4:29; 10:12; 11:13, 18; 13:3; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10). The prophets look forward to a day when people will have a single heart, that is, complete devotion to YHWH (e.g. ‘one heart and one way’, Jer 32:38-39;³³ Ezek 11:19).³⁴ This transformation will happen by the Spirit (Ezek 11:19; 36:26-27; 37:14; cf. the internalising of the torah by being written on human hearts, Jer 31:31-34).

Provision for those in need was a duty among Jewish people—witness those who sought alms at the Jerusalem temple (e.g. Acts 3:2-3), for giving alms was one of the pillars of Judaism,³⁵ and to give alms when going to participate in temple prayers or sacrifices showed a person’s devotion to YHWH (cf. Tobit 4:8-11; 12:8-9).³⁶ The injunctions of Scripture stand behind this, such as: ‘Whoever shows favour³⁷ to the poor lends to the LORD, and will be repaid in full’ (Prov 19:17). Thus (for example) in the torah, the triennial tithe was to be given to those in poverty: Levites, resident aliens, widows and orphans (Deut 14:28-29; 26:12-15), and the land’s produce in the sabbatical year was for the benefit of such people (Exod 23:11).³⁸ The prophets called wealthy and powerful people in Israel to generosity towards those in need (e.g. Jer

³³ LXX 39:38-39 differs, having ὁδὸν ἑτέραν καὶ καρδίαν ἑτέραν ‘another way and another heart’.

³⁴ Cf. 1 Chron 12:38, where the single-minded devotion is to David as YHWH’s appointed king.

³⁵ E.g. Tob 1:3, 16; 4:7, 10-11, 16; 12:8-9; 14:10-11; Sir 7:10; 12:3; 17:22; 29:12; 40:17, 24; cf. Acts 9:36; 10:2, 4, 31; 20:35; 24:17; *m.* ‘Abot 1.2.

³⁶ ‘Begging in Jerusalem was concentrated around the holy places, i.e. at that time around the Temple’, Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1969), 117.

³⁷ The Greek has ἐλεέω ‘I have mercy’; the Hebrew is יָרַח ‘I show favour’ (CDCH s.v.).

³⁸ See the valuable summaries in Christopher J. H. Wright, *Living as the People of God: The Relevance of Old Testament Ethics* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1983), 85-87; Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions*, NSBT 7 (Nottingham: Apollos, 1999), 41-49.

9:23-24). As we noted earlier, underlying these injunctions is the belief that nothing is ultimately owned by people, since 'The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it' (Ps 24:1). Israelites and later Jews were called to see their role as stewarding what God provided, rather than hoarding it for themselves.

Brian Capper makes a specific proposal concerning the Jewish cultural setting of the early believers' sharing, arguing that the Qumran community's practice is reflected in that of the believers.³⁹ The Dead Sea sect had a two-stage entry into membership. In the first stage (a 'novitiate' in monastic terms) the postulant's possessions were handed over to the community's bursar, but not merged into the common pool (1QS 6.19-20). A year later, if the postulant desired to join the community permanently and was accepted, their possessions were then irretrievably merged into the communal property (1QS 6.21-22). The full community of possessions was a key boundary between insiders and outsiders (1QS 9.8-9), and those who lied about their property were punished by exclusion from the common meal for a year, and by having their rations cut by 25% (1QS 6.24-25).

Capper reads Acts 5:4 in the light of these practices: 'While the field remained yours, it remained yours to dispose of, and after it was sold, it was at your disposal, wasn't it? Why did you contrive this deed in your heart? You have not lied to human beings, but to God.' He suggests that a two-stage membership process was going on, and that Ananias and Sapphira were entering into the first stage of community membership in which their possessions remained their own, while those possessions were placed in the hands of the community bursar via Peter's feet. So their lie in claiming to hand over all their property was comparable with lying to the Qumran community, but now seen as lying to God through his representative, Peter.

Capper's argument has the strength of locating the earliest believers' practices in a roughly contemporary Jewish matrix, and indicates that Luke's description is historically plausible: the Qumran community offers a model of sharing possessions within Judaism and from our period.⁴⁰ However, Peter's statements in Acts 5:4

³⁹ Brian J. Capper, 'The Palestinian Cultural Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods,' in *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham, BAFCS 4 (Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1995), 323-56; Brian J. Capper, 'Community of Goods in the Early Jerusalem Church,' *ANRW II/26.2* (1995): 1730-74. In what follows I draw on my discussion in Walton, 'Communism,' 106-8.

⁴⁰ So also Justin Taylor, SM, 'The Community of Goods among the First Christians and among the Essenes,' in *Historical Perspectives: From the Hasmoneans to Bar Kokhba in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed.

indicate that it was *before* handing the money over that it was at the disposal of Ananias and Sapphira, whereas on Capper's view that should be so *after* they handed the money over, since the money was still theirs on the two-stage model. In addition, there was a variety of practice among Essenes outside Qumran,⁴¹ and the wider practice was probably better known in Palestine. The Damascus Document portrays Essene communities which had a common fund to provide for widows and orphans without requiring compulsory pooling of possessions. For example, community members were expected to give at least two days' income per month to the 'Guardian and the Judges' to provide for people in need (CD 14.13). These small communities within towns and villages would also pool at least some of their daily earnings in order to buy food which was then prepared communally (Philo, *Hypothetica* 1.10-11).⁴²

Thus Capper's argument for the early Christians having a close parallel with the Qumran practice of sharing possessions fails at key points, although (as noted above) it is suggestive for the historicity of Luke's account. The practice of the distributed Essene communities may provide a better model, particularly if (as Capper, Riesner and others argue) there was an Essene quarter in Jerusalem close to the location of the upper room.⁴³

Graeco-Roman culture

Greek and Roman ideals of shared possessions have also been claimed to stand behind these stories, and it is certainly likely that readers of Acts who knew the Greek texts might hear echoes of these ideals. Let us consider some key proposed parallels.⁴⁴

David Goodblatt, Avital Pinnick and Daniel R. Schwartz, *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah* 37 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 147-61 here 155.

⁴¹ Philo, *Good Person* 76-77, 85-87; *Hypothetica* 11.4-13; and Josephus, *Ant.* 18.1.5 §§20-22; *J.W.* 2.8.3-4 §§122-27 provide evidence of such Essene communities in Palestinian towns and villages.

⁴² As Capper, 'Community,' 1764 also records.

⁴³ Capper, 'Context,' 341-50; Capper, 'Community,' 1752-59; Rainer Riesner, 'Das Jerusalemer Essenerviertel und die Urgemeinde: Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* V 145; 11QMiqdasch 46,13-16; *Apostelgeschichte* 1-6 und *Archäologie*,' *ANRW* II/26.2 (1995): 1775-922; Rainer Riesner, 'Synagogues in Jerusalem,' in *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham, *BAFCS* 4 (Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1995), 179-211 here 190-92 (with further references). Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 131-32 sees the (wider) Jewish practice of distributing poor relief daily and weekly as mirrored in the early believers' practices in Acts 6:2, etc., although David P. Seccombe, 'Was There Organised Charity in Jerusalem before the Christians?,' *JTS* ns 29 (1978): 140-43 here 140-43 notes the presence of beggars in the Gospels and Acts as evidence against such a system being widespread.

⁴⁴ For a helpful survey, see Kyoung-Jin Kim, *Stewardship and Almsgiving in Luke's Theology*, *JNTSup* 155 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 253-77.

εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινά ‘they used to hold all things common’ (Acts 2:44) expresses a sentiment similar to Plato and Seneca. Plato looks back to the earliest times of Athens as a period when ‘none of its members possessed any private property, but rather they regarded all they had as the common property of all’ (*Critias* 110C-D [Lamb, LCL]).⁴⁵ Seneca envisaged human beginnings as a time of ‘the assured possession by each man of the common resources’ so that ‘you could not find a poor person among them’ (*Epistles* 90.38 [Gummere, LCL]). The parallel description ἦν αὐτοῖς ἅπαντα κοινά ‘all things were common to them’ (Acts 4:32) sounds similar to a saying of Aristotle and others, κοινὰ τὰ φίλων ‘friends’ goods are common property’ (*Eth. nic.* 9.8.2 [LCL, Rackham]; cf. *Pol.* 1263A; Plato, *Resp.* 449C; Plutarch, *Mor.* 767E; Philo, *Abraham* 235). The Pythagoreans were known for their sharing of goods (Iamblichus, *Vit. Pyth.* 30.168). However, these ideals allowed for private ownership: the Cynic Epistles include a letter addressed to Plato, writing, ‘And if you need anything that is yours, write us, for my possessions, Plato, are by all rights yours, even as they were Socrates’.⁴⁶

Plato and Aristotle both locate discussion of sharing possessions in the context of ordering government in such a way that enables unity rather than division.⁴⁷ Readers who recognised such an echo would hear a claim by Luke that the believers show the unity desired by such Graeco-Roman writers.⁴⁸

Further, the believers being καρδιά και ψυχὴ μία ‘one heart and soul’ rings bells with ancient ideas of friendship. Diogenes Laertius records Aristotle answering the question ‘What is a friend?’ by μία ψυχὴ δύο σώματασιν ἐνοικοῦσα ‘one soul inhabiting

⁴⁵ See also Plato, *Republic* 420C-422D; 462B-464A; *Laws* 679B-C; 684C-D; 744B-746C; 757C

⁴⁶ *Socratic* 26.2 ‘To Plato’ (translation: Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition*, SBLSPS 12 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977), 281).

⁴⁷ Plato, *Resp.* 464A-66D; Aristotle, *Pol.* 2.1-2.

⁴⁸ Alan J. Thompson, *One Lord, One People: The Unity of the Church in Acts in Its Literary Setting*, LNTS 359 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 89-93.

two bodies' (*Lives* 5.20).⁴⁹ Such friendship entailed readiness to share possessions (Aristotle, *Nic. eth.* 9.8.2, cited above).⁵⁰

However, such friendship differs in two ways from the picture Luke paints. First, Luke does not use the language of friendship, but calls the group τῶν πιστευσάντων 'the believers' (4:32) and κοινωνία 'fellowship/partnership' (2:42),⁵¹ which is not what would be expected if Luke were echoing Graeco-Roman ideals. Luke characterises the group by their believing relationship to God as known through Jesus, in whom they shared fellowship, rather than by their friendly relations with each other.⁵² They thus functioned as what is inelegantly called a 'fictive kindship group', regarding and treating each other as family, even though they were not biologically a family.⁵³ Secondly, the patronage system which pervaded the first-century Roman world, within which the language of friendship was used, entailed reciprocity: to give to another necessarily put the other in your debt.⁵⁴ Alan Mitchell notes the lack of reciprocity—indeed, the challenge to it—in Acts, and notes that Acts echoes the ideals of Jesus of giving without expectation of return (e.g. Luke 6:34-35; 14:12-14).⁵⁵

It is sometimes suggested, most recently by Joshua Noble in a 2018 Notre Dame PhD thesis,⁵⁶ that key phrases in Acts 2:42-27 and 4:32-35 are drawn from Greek and Roman ideals of the Golden Age, a mythical time in the distant past when all was well among people and goods were freely shared. Noble traces this theme from Hesiod in

⁴⁹ Similarly, friends are people 'who, though existing separately in bodies, forcibly unite and fuse their souls together' (Plutarch, *Moralia* 767E, my translation). For numerous further parallels, see Pieter W. van der Horst, 'Hellenistic Parallels to Acts (Chapters 3 and 4),' *JSNT* 35 (1989): 37-46 here 46; Eckhard Plümacher, *Lukas als hellenistischer Schriftsteller: Studien zur Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 16-18; Richard P. Thompson, *Keeping the Church in its Place: The Church as Narrative Character in Acts* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 71 n. 185. On friendship in the hellenistic world, see the useful discussion in Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012-15), 1:1017-19.

⁵⁰ See the wide-ranging discussion of friendship in Hume, *Community*, 44-77.

⁵¹ Severus says concerning Albinus, whom he (deceptively) considers a friend (φίλον), 'All that we had belonged to Albinus by his partnership (κοινωνία) in a strong rule' (Herodian, *Histories* 3.6.2). Here, κοινωνία denotes a military alliance, rather than the kind of person to person (and group) sharing in God-in-Jesus by the Spirit envisaged in Acts.

⁵² With Dupont, *Salvation*, 102; Hume, *Community*, 97-99.

⁵³ See Reta Haltzman Finger, 'Mary, Please Pass the Bread': Social Implications of the Lord's Supper in the Early Church,' in *The Lord's Supper: Believers' Church Perspectives*, ed. Dale R. Stoffer (Scottsdale: Herald, 1997), 250-55, 330 here 130-36 and the literature there cited.

⁵⁴ See John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), esp. 35-39; Alan C. Mitchell, 'The Social Function of Friendship in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37,' *JBL* 111 (1992): 255-72 here 264-66.

⁵⁵ Mitchell, 'Function,' 266-67.

⁵⁶ Joshua Noble, 'Common Property, the Gold Age, and Empire in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35' (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2018).

the seventh or eighth century BC through to its appropriation in the Sibylline Oracles in the early centuries AD. He argues that features such as the sharing of possessions in Acts portray the early church as entering into a Golden Age through the coming of the Spirit, and thus that Luke critiques the claim that a new Golden Age will come through the emperor and claims that Jesus is superior to Caesar.⁵⁷ Noble is recognising some fascinating parallels here, and makes a plausible case that those among Luke's readers who knew the Golden Age myths might see echoes. The correspondence is not full, however, since some key features of Golden Age myths are not found in Acts, such as the spontaneous production of fruit and vegetables by the earth.⁵⁸ Moreover, as Gregson notes, the Golden Age texts tend to speak only of particular elite groups as sharing possessions—presumably where reciprocity could be expected—rather than a notion of equality among richer and poorer people.⁵⁹

Conclusion

There are features in the Acts 'sharing' passages which would resonate with readers who knew the biblical and Graeco-Roman sources we have considered, and that suggests that an either-or choice about the cultural and social background to Luke's accounts is unnecessary. No single model is a complete fit with the picture in Acts; there is a real *novum* because of the coming of the Spirit, seen by the comparison with these other sources.⁶⁰

The ideal of a shared life expressed in community of goods is evident in both Jewish and Graeco-Roman thinking, and Luke's accounts say 'yes' to many aspects of that thinking while saying 'no' to other parts. Notably, the required reciprocity and the limitation to elites in the Graeco-Roman models are challenged by the democratisation and asymmetry of giving implicit in the Acts pictures. The presentation of money at the apostles' feet removes the possibility of the donor placing the recipient(s) under obligation, since the distribution was not done by the donor or their agents. The biblical hope that none of the Lord's people would be in

⁵⁷ For the detail of this argument, see Noble, 'Common Property,' 220-83.

⁵⁸ Noble mentions this as a distinctive feature of the Golden Age myth, but without adequate discussion of its absence in Acts ('Common Property,' 72, 74, 217, 69). He only observes, 'Although this is one of the most distinctive features of the myth, there is no hint in the summaries or elsewhere in Acts that the Spirit has brought about an increase in agricultural productivity' (269).

⁵⁹ Gregson, *Everything*, 54-55.

⁶⁰ See the helpful comparative discussion in Gregson, *Everything*, 71-78.

need (Deut 15:4) is realised in the setting of a now-and-not-yet eschatology: the believers live in a time of ‘refreshings’ (Acts 3:20) while they await the ‘restoration of all things’ (Acts 3:21). The not-yet nature of the situation is seen in the tragedy of Ananias and Sapphira; the now of the situation is seen in the provision for those in need as a result of the sharing of goods.

Historical issues

Here, I address two issues: whether the community of goods in the early chapters of Acts is historically plausible; and whether it did happen but soon stopped because of its impracticality.

*Did it happen?*⁶¹

Hans Conzelmann is incredulous about the sharing of possessions in Acts 2, 4, and 5, and regards Luke’s account as ‘idealized’, since the language echoes utopian ideals in the Greek world (as we saw above), and there was no evident production to support the consumption involved.⁶² Ernst Haenchen regards 4:34-35 as resulting from Luke generalising from the story of Barnabas and Ananias (4:36–5:11)⁶³—interestingly, Haenchen does not mention Sapphira! He regards the proposed parallel with the Qumran community as not a real parallel, because the Qumran community was celibate and the believers were not (1 Cor 9:5), and marriage would be incompatible with ‘monastic’ life.⁶⁴ He does not consider the way of life of the Essene communities in towns and villages to be a real parallel, somewhat surprisingly.

On the other hand, Gregson rightly observes that idealisation in narrative is not the same as creation of that narrative.⁶⁵ In addition, Johnson points to the evidence of economic sharing among the Pauline communities, as well as in sub-apostolic sources.⁶⁶ The Acts passages (describing earlier events, but written later than the

⁶¹ For a valuable survey of views, including the reception of this theme, see Finger, *Widows*, 12-47. For other examples of Christian ‘renewal movements’ who engaged in sharing possessions, see Keener, *Acts*, 1:1028 n 387.

⁶² Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 24. Barrett, *Acts*, 1:169 is similarly sceptical.

⁶³ Haenchen, *Acts*, 233.

⁶⁴ Haenchen, *Acts*, 234.

⁶⁵ Gregson, *Everything*, 44.

⁶⁶ Johnson, *Acts*, 62 cites Gal 2:10; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8–9; Rom 15:2-5; Did. 4:5-8; Barn. 19:8. See the discussion of the Pauline texts in Deborah Elaine Watson, ‘Paul’s Collection in Light of Motivations

Paulines) may well explain the continuation of the sharing found in Paul, as well as in James (e.g. 1:27–27; 2:14-17; 5:1-6).⁶⁷ Further, as I argued above, the community of goods in Acts is not compulsory, in the sense that everyone was required to hand over their property on entering the community, but voluntary and occasional. Thus what we see in Acts is not a simple transposition of the Qumran ideals, even though it shares features with the practice of both the Qumran community and the dispersed Essene communities.

Although the language and phrasing of Luke's descriptions may be to a degree idealised, the incidents with Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11) and the Hellenist widows (6:1-6) show that Luke is not engaged in a cover-up of potentially embarrassing material—he reports these unforeseen side-effects of the sharing. These do not look like stories which Luke would invent, but they both presuppose the sharing of possessions described in 2:34-35 and 4:32-35. The stylising of Philo and Josephus's descriptions of the Essenes was held as a reason for regarding their accounts as invented,⁶⁸ until 1948 when the Rule of the Community (1QS) was discovered. Once the essential historicity of the Qumran and wider Essene community of goods is accepted, it cannot be claimed that there was no precedent in the culture for the early church's sharing of possessions.

A key feature to consider as the basis of the early believers' practice is our evidence for Jesus's own concern for people in poverty, and the common purse of his disciple-band. Jesus repeatedly criticised the hoarding of wealth at the expense of those in poverty (e.g. the parables of the rich fool, Luke 12:16-21, and of the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31⁶⁹). Jesus told his disciples to depend on others as they travelled around the countryside, and not to take a purse with them (Luke 9:3-5), reflecting his own dependence on the support of others (e.g. Luke 8:1-3; 9:58). Judas held their common purse, and contributed to people in poverty from it (John 13:29 incidentally

and Mechanisms for Aid to the Poor in the First-Century World' (PhD diss., Durham University, 2006), 151-84 (summary: 83-84)

⁶⁷ On James, see Blomberg, *Neither*, 148-60.

⁶⁸ E.g. Walter Bauer and Georg Strecker, (ed.), *Aufsätze und kleine Schriften* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1967), 1-59, an essay originally published in 1924.

⁶⁹ For a fine discussion of the way this acts as a window into Jesus's teaching on poverty and wealth, and the similar material in Acts, see Reuben Bredenhof, *Failure and Prospect: Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31) in the Context of Luke-Acts*, LNTS 603 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), esp. 156-76.

presupposes that the group gave periodically to people in poverty).⁷⁰ It is reasonable to see Jesus's practice as the inspiration for the early believers' economic sharing.⁷¹

Capper identifies Jesus's and the early believers' practice regarding possessions as an example of virtuoso religion, a sociological category for those who embodied the highest values of their community, often as an elite who led the way for others.⁷² This allows Capper to argue that it is plausible for a remarkable level of sharing and interdependence to be a feature of Jesus's immediate disciple-band and the early believing community in Jerusalem, a practice which was transformed as the movement grew and spread. Thus, over time the form of sharing changed, and so we turn to consider this.

Did it happen and then stop?

The lack of accounts later in Acts, and in our other early Christian sources, of a community of goods like that of Acts 2, 4 and 5 led earlier scholars to consider that the earliest believers realised that their practice was mistaken and unworkable in the longer term.⁷³ Some consider that the believers had an 'enthusiastic' expectation of the imminent return of Jesus, and thus they did not worry about possessions.⁷⁴ Others suggest that the Jerusalem community ran out of resources and that was why they later needed the help provided by the Antioch community (11:28-30) and Paul's collection.⁷⁵ Each of these views sees the believers coming to regard the practices of the 'Jerusalem springtime' as mistaken or, at least, impossible to continue—and thus, in either case, abandoned.

It is more plausible, however, to see later practice as instantiating the same principles as the Jerusalem sharing of possessions in the early days.⁷⁶ Once the believing community spread outside Jerusalem, it was inevitable that a different type

⁷⁰ On the common purse of Jesus and his disciples, see Gregson, *Everything*, 7-21.

⁷¹ With James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem* (Cambridge/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 182.

⁷² Brian J. Capper, 'Jesus, Virtuoso Religion, and the Community of Goods,' in *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker and Kelly D. Liebengood (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 60-80 here esp. 62-80.

⁷³ E.g. W. A. Criswell, *Acts: An Exposition*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 1:113-19.

⁷⁴ So, e.g., Barrett, *Acts*, 1:168; for a cogent critique of the idea that the early believers expected an 'imminent parousia', see N. T. Wright, 'Hope Deferred? Against the Dogma of Delay,' *EC* 9 (2018): 37-82.

⁷⁵ E.g. Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 98-99.

⁷⁶ See the detailed discussions of Acts 11; 1 Cor 11; 2 Cor 8-9; and 1 and 2 Thess in Gregson, *Everything*.

of discipleship would be necessary, perhaps modelled on people such as Martha and Mary, who hosted Jesus from time to time, but were not part of his itinerant group.⁷⁷ The travelling disciple-band was not, in other words, the only way of following Jesus during his earthly ministry;⁷⁸ so why should there be only one way of expressing the economic aspects of discipleship during Jesus's heavenly ministry post-ascension? However, that 'settled' discipleship was within a set of Jesus-following communities who saw themselves as interconnected, as belonging to the same Lord—and thus belonging to one another. This attitude found expression in church-to-church provision of aid, such as from Antioch to Jerusalem during a famine (Acts 11:28-30),⁷⁹ or Paul's collection for the saints at Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9; Rom 15:25-27).⁸⁰ The principle at work in Paul's key argument is *ισότης* 'equality' (2 Cor 8:14)—those how presently have more share with those presently in need, recognising that there may come a day when the roles are reversed.

Economic sharing also operated within believing communities. Paul expected such provision when the Corinthian believers met together.⁸¹ His horror at their lack of sharing in meals, particularly because richer members of the community ate and drank large amounts in the presence of the poorer members (1 Cor 11:20-21), witnesses to what Paul considered the norm among the churches. Paul saw their meal practices as a denial of the meaning of sharing in the eucharistic celebration (1 Cor 11:27-32).

The believers' provision seems to have included those in poverty, whether inside or outside the believing communities. For example, Dorcas/Tabitha is commended as one who provides for those in poverty (Acts 9:36); she makes clothing for widows, who are proverbially poor (9:39). It also includes travelling church emissaries, such as Paul, who is hosted by the businesswoman Lydia in Philippi (16:14-15), by Jason in Thessalonica (17:5), and by the Cypriot Mnason in Jerusalem (21:16).

⁷⁷ Luke 10:38-32; John 11; 12:1; cf. Mary, who hosted the early community in her home (Acts 12:12).

⁷⁸ Capper, 'Jesus,' 71-76.

⁷⁹ See the valuable discussion of Christian and other responses to famine in Gregson, *Everything*, 79-96.

⁸⁰ On the collection, see David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts*, WUNT 2/248 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

⁸¹ On practice in Corinth, the seminal essay of Jerome Murphy-O'Connor continues to be valuable (Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, 3rd ed. (Collegeville, MN, MN: Liturgical, 2002), 178-85). In addition, see the recent studies of Lanuwabang Jamir, *Exclusion and Judgment in Fellowship Meals: The Socio-Historical Background of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016); Gregson, *Everything*, 97-140.

So in one way, the early believers did change tack in how they expressed their commitment to sharing, and the communal sharing of the early days in Jerusalem may have died out or have become reduced significantly. In another way, however, the commitment continued, but found fresh expressions in intra- and inter-community sharing of food and other resources.

What is Luke advocating?

Finally, we turn to draw the threads of this discussion together to summarise what Luke achieves by his presentation of these features of the early believing communities. Luke's focus in Acts is on the work of God, as God engages with people, both Jewish and gentile, and draws them into his community.⁸² It is therefore striking to notice that the three key passages we have studied are each concluded by growth notices:

Every day the Lord was adding to their group those being saved. (2:47b)

Through the apostles' hands many signs and wonders were being done among the people. They all used to meet together in unity in Solomon's Portico, but none of the rest dared to join them; nevertheless the people spoke highly of them. *More than ever believers were added to the Lord, large numbers of both men and women*, so that they even carried sick people into the streets and placed them on beds and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on them. A great number of those from the towns surrounding Jerusalem kept gathering, bringing sick people and those troubled by unclean spirits, and they were all healed. (5:12-16)

God's word continued growing and the number of disciples in Jerusalem continued to multiply, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith. (6:7)

These passages strongly suggest that Luke believes that God approves of the sharing which the believers engaged in, for it resulted in divinely-driven growth of the community both numerically and in the effectiveness of the apostles' ministry of signs and wonders.

As we have noticed already, the early community's sharing of possessions is in tune with Luke's presentation of Jesus's teaching and lifestyle: in both Jesus is an advocate for people in poverty, and commends those who act generously (and justly) in sharing their goods.⁸³ Notably, Zacchaeus receives a powerful commendation by

⁸² See Steve Walton, 'The Acts—of God? What is the 'Acts of the Apostles' All About?,' *EvQ* 80 (2008): 291-306.

⁸³ On wealth and poverty in Luke-Acts, see the fine scholarly study, Christopher M. Hays, *Luke's Wealth Ethics: A Study in Their Coherence and Character*, WUNT 2/275 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010),

Jesus for both his appropriate restoration of goods to those he has defrauded and his donation to people in poverty: he is a true son of Abraham (Luke 19:8-9). Abraham appears earlier in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, as the opponent of the rich man who has neglected poor Lazarus (Luke 16:22-26), and this is Luke's first mention of Abraham since that parable. Zacchaeus is presented as a rich man who does what the rich man in the parable should have done, and is thus one whom Abraham will welcome in the world to come. The women who travel with Jesus and the Twelve and provide for Jesus's travelling band exemplify the readiness to treat wealth as subordinate to 'the good news of the reign of God' (Luke 8:1). Luke's Jesus is not opposed to people holding property or goods, for he stays with such people (e.g. Martha and Mary, Luke 10:38); however, he does expect them to hold such things lightly, as on the palm of a hand, with an openness to sharing them with others in need.

As we have seen, these principles carry through into Acts, not only in the early period, but also in the sharing of goods and property at later stages. Believers provide hospitality for others (16:14-15; 17:5; 21:16); they support Paul materially while he is under arrest (27:3);⁸⁴ and Paul himself warns against coveting for oneself, and commends the idea of elders being able to provide for those in greater need, offering himself as a model (20:33-35). Church-to-church aid is exemplified by the Antiochenes sending money to Jerusalem (11:28-30).

Luke's concern, then, may be summed up as regarding material goods and property as held in stewardship by believers; they are to be generous to those in need because and as God in Christ has been generous to them (cf. 2 Cor 8:9).⁸⁵ The form of this generosity will vary from place to place and time to time, of course, but Luke wants believers' commitment to it to be steadfast.

and his more popular *Renouncing Everything: Money and Discipleship in Luke* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2016).

⁸⁴ Prisoners needed family or friends to visit to meet their needs for food and drink, since usually little or nothing was provided by the authorities. See Brian M. Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody*, BAFCS 3 (Carlisle/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Eerdmans, 1994), 196-99, 209-16.

⁸⁵ On stewardship in Luke-Acts, see Kim, *Stewardship*, chs 5-6.

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