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Expecting the Unexpected in Luke 7:1-10

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Abstract
Luke's account of Jesus's healing of the man enslaved to the centurion exhibits a number of unusual and unexpected features: a gentile centurion in a small Jewish village, an odd mixture of miracle and pronouncement stories, striking variations from the precedent story of Elisha, surprising twists in the plot, and others. Rhetoricians of Luke's day discussed various effects that unexpected elements could have on an audience, and some of these are reflected in this account. Luke has used the multiple unexpected elements of this story to make it interesting to his audience, to intensify it alongside the raising of the dead, to re-engage his audience after the Sermon on the Plain, and to cement this episode in his audience's memory as a precursor to Cornelius and the larger gentile mission in Acts.

1. Introduction

A good story, a convincing speech, an engaging drama. All of these depend on a single foundational factor – the audience's attention. Without the attention of the audience, key pieces of the plot go unnoticed, main points of the speech get missed, and a character's agony is ignored. Storytellers, dramatists, and rhetoricians have intuitively and sometimes explicitly reflected on ways to capture the attention of their audiences and keep them engaged. In particular, the rhetorical instructors of the Hellenistic-Roman world considered 'the unexpected' to be a means of capturing their audience's interest. The argument of this article is that the author of the Third Gospel has employed several unexpected elements in his account of the healing of the centurion's slave in 7:1-10 in order to get, keep, and direct the attention of his audience at this juncture of the Gospel narrative.

Most previous studies of this pericope have focused on issues of tradition history raised by the relationship of Luke 7:1-10 to John 4:46-54 and Matthew

8:5-13.[1] A wide range of theories have been put forward to explain the similarities and differences between Matthew and Luke, especially with reference to the form(s) of Q that either author might have had.[2] While the investigation that follows deals with the final form of the text, it proceeds on the general assumption that Luke has adapted sources available to him to tell the more original form of the story in his own skilful linguistic idiom and that Matthew has abbreviated the account in keeping with its setting in his Gospel.[3] This investigation will focus

1. Anton Dauer, *Johannes und Lukas: Untersuchungen zu den johanneisch-lukanischen Parallelperikopen Joh 4, 46-54/Lk 7, 1-10 – Joh 12, 1-8/Lk 7, 36-50, 10, 38-42 – Joh 20, 19-29/Luk 24,36-49*, FB 50 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1984) and Stephan Landis, *Das Verhältnis des Johannesevangeliums zu den Synoptikern: Am Beispiel von Mt 8,5-13; Lk 7,1-10; John 4,46-54*, BZNW 74 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994). While interesting from a tradition-historical perspective, the relationship of Luke 7:1-10 to the material in John is more distant and not pertinent to this investigation.

2. An exhaustive catalogue of the various reconstructions of Q 7:1-10 is found in Steven R. Johnson, *Q 7:1-10: The Centurion's Faith in Jesus' Word*, Documenta Q (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), which presents the Matthaean version as more original. The theories fall into one of three broad categories: Matthew has the more original version of Q and Luke has adduced other source material; Matthew has the more original version and Luke himself has added to the story; or, Luke has the more original form of Q and Matthew has abbreviated his account. For support of the position that Matthew has the more original material and Luke has added other source material, see Uwe Wegner, *Der Hauptmann von Kafarnaum (Mt 7,28a; 8,5-10.13 par Lk 7,1-10): Ein Beitrag zur Q-Forschung*, WUNT 2/14 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984), 236–247 and Tim Schramm, *Der Markus-Stoff bei Lukas: Eine literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, SNTSMS 14 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 40–43, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511659638. For support of the general position that Matthew has the more original version and the additions are from Luke's hand see P. J. Judge, 'Luke 7,1-10: Sources and Redaction', in *L'Evangile de Luc – The Gospel of Luke*, ed. F. Neirynck, BETL 32 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989); Robert A. J. Gagnon, 'Luke's Motives for Redaction in the Account of the Double Delegation in Luke 7:1-10', *NovT* 36 (1994): 122–145, https://doi.org/10.1163/156853694X00021; and Robert A. J. Gagnon, 'The Shape of Matthew's Q Text of the Centurion at Capernaum: Did it Mention Delegations?', *NTS* 40 (1994): 133–142, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500020488. For support of the general position that Luke has the more original account and Matthew has abbreviated it, see Dauer, *Johannes und Lukas*, 39–125; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 630–633; and Heinz Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium, Erster Teil: Kommentar zu Kapital 1,1 – 9,50*, HThKNT III/1 (Freiburg: Herders, 2000), 395–397. Gagnon ('Luke's Motives', 123 n. 4) provides a list of prior works supporting this final position, noting the variations.

3. This largely follows the tentative conclusion of Marshall, who says 'It is more likely that the story appeared in different forms in two versions of Q, and/or that Matthew has abbreviated it, but the possibility of Lucan expansion cannot be excluded.' See I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 278. As Blomberg notes, Matthew would have abbreviated the account based on the cultural principle that a person is understood to be acting and speaking personally when sending agents (cf. Matt

not on source and historical matters, but on the way that the account in Luke's Gospel features unexpected or surprising elements that support larger rhetorical and thematic aims in Luke-Acts.[4] Why is there a gentile centurion in the small Jewish village of Capernaum? Is this a miracle story or a pronouncement story? Why are there so many variations from the classic story of Elisha and Naaman? And why does a second delegation suddenly interrupt Jesus on his way and assert the centurion's unworthiness? These unexpected elements play a key role in garnering the audience's attention at this juncture in the Gospel narrative and highlighting the key role that gentiles will play across Luke-Acts.

Ancient rhetoricians reflected on how to influence their audience, providing several lists and explanations of techniques related to attention and persuasion.[5] Most scholars accept that Luke had up to a secondary level of rhetorical training.[6] Luke may not have read Quintilian's magisterial *Institutio Oratoria* or other rhetorical treatises, but one can still use them as a lens to analyse the authorial practices of ancient authors like Luke, since the writings of these rhetoricians preserve organised reflections on the rhetorical skills that Luke had exposure to, and the rhetorical techniques that he and his audiences would have encountered in the surrounding culture. Writing on tragedy in the *Poetics*, Aristotle notes that 'awesome and pitiable events take place especially when they occur outside

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8:8 and Luke 7:6-7). See Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 278–279.

4. It should be noted that while the elements considered below are unexpected and unusual, none of them are historically *impossible*. Luke has to keep his narrative in the realm of the credible and realistic according to the instruction of Theon (*Prog.* 79.20–31). Also, see Mikeal C. Parsons and Michael Wade Martin, *Ancient Rhetoric and the New Testament: The Influence of Elementary Greek Composition* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 71–72. Thus, while several elements of what Luke recounts in 7:1-10 are surprising and uncommon, they are all still historically plausible.

5. Surprisingly, a Festschrift entitled *La Surprise dans la Bible* contains no references to any of the rhetoricians surveyed here and has very little systematic reflection on the nature and effects of 'surprising' or 'unexpected' elements in a story. See Geert van Oyen and André Wénin, *La Surprise dans la Bible: Hommage à Camille Focant*, BETL 247 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012).

6. Mikeal C. Parsons, 'Luke and the Progymnasmata: A Preliminary Investigation into the Preliminary Exercises', in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, ed. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, SBLSymS 20 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2003), 43–63; Sean A. Adams, 'Luke and the Progymnasmata: Rhetorical Handbooks, Rhetorical Sophistication and Genre Selection', in *Ancient Education and Early Christianity*, ed. Matthew Ryan Hague and Andrew W. Pitts, LNTS 533 (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 137–154, 143–145; and Ronald F. Hock, 'Observing a Teacher of *Progymnasmata*', in *Ancient Education and Early Christianity*, ed. Matthew Ryan Hague and Andrew W. Pitts, LNTS 533 (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 39–70, 42–44.

of expectation (παρά τὴν δόξαν)' (1452a.3-5).[7] Events retain their 'amazing' character when they appear to have happened by design rather than by pure chance (Aristotle, *Poet*. 1452.6-8).[8] Thus, the twists that make up the heart of a tragic plot are best achieved by events that are surprising but still follow a reasonable course of cause and effect.[9] Aristotle also recognises how surprising elements intensify emotions for the sake of persuasion: 'People are all the more angry if an unexpected (παρά δόξαν) bad thing happens and more joyful if an unexpected good thing happens' (*Rhet*. 2.2.11).[10] Thus, 'the unexpected' can serve both to inform the flow of the plot and intensify key elements within it.

Closer to the time of Luke's Gospel, Cicero lists 'something unexpected (*improvisum quiddam*)' as one of the possible figures of speech for rhetoricians to employ (*Orat.* 3.207; quoted by Quintilian in *Inst*. 9.1.35). In another work, Cicero expands on this by explaining that 'An oration becomes pleasant when you speak of some unexpected event (*exspectationes exitus*) or something surprising (*inopinatos*) or interjected, for whatever moves one's soul excites wonder' (*Part. Or.* 9.32). Things that are 'marvelous and not expected (*nec opinata*)', such as prodigies, oracles, and divine interventions, stir the wonder of the hearer and contribute to the enjoyment felt by the audience (*Part. Or.* 21.73; also quoted by Quintilian in *Inst.* 4.1.107). A rhetorician roughly contemporary with Luke notes that 'if the audience has been worn out by listening', then the rhetor can try a number of techniques, including humour, irony, a fable, innuendo, or 'something outside of expectations (*praeter expectationem*)' (*Rhet. ad Her.* 1.6.10). Quintilian (*Inst.* 9.2.22 and 9.4.90) notes the use of 'something unexpected (*aliquid inexspectatum*)' as a way to emphasise a particular point (alongside other techniques like imagery, digressions, contrasts, etc.). Resonating with Cicero's observations, he notes that 'novelty and change are pleasing in oratory, and what is unexpected (*inopinata*)

7. Translations of ancient texts are the author's own.

8. Unfortunately, we only have the portion of the *Poetics* that deals with tragedy. The section on comedy, which might have been more relevant to 7:1-10, is not preserved.

9. Currie speaks of 'the unexpected' occurring in the tense of the future perfect – it both is yet to happen and has already happened. In some way, a narrative must both foreshadow the unexpected so that it does not seem random and arbitrary but also keep it hidden from us. See Mark Currie, *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise*, Frontiers of Theory (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 5–8, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748676309.

10. Unfortunately, Christopher Miller considers Aristotle's comments on reversal in tragedy to be comprehensive of the role of the unexpected in ancient rhetoric/drama and jumps from Aristotle to the Renaissance. See Christopher R. Miller, *Surprise: The Poetics of the Unexpected from Milton to Austen* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2015), 16–19, https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801455780.

always gives special delight' (*Inst.* 8.6.51). Thus, a broad swathe of rhetoricians in the ancient world noted the powerful role of 'the unexpected' in oratory as a tool for garnering the attention of an audience and focusing it with emotion.

Our ancient rhetoricians do not reflect in detail on exactly what is 'outside of expectations'. One should also note the variety of terminology employed around this notion in the quotations above, suggesting a lack of systematisation. The unexpected could be understood as some kind of discordance between culturally shared notions of the normal flow of events expressed in a speech/story and the actual elements employed and described in a given story.[11] Thus, what is unexpected or surprising probably depends on several specific elements of culture, social setting, plot, and language that would have been broadly deemed 'appropriate' to a rhetorical moment by the author and audience. Exactly what is 'unexpected' could occur in any number of elements in the speech/story: turns of the plot, changes in the characters, unusual aspects of the setting, strange turns of phrase, and more. The following analysis will look at four categories of unexpected elements in Luke 7:1-10:

a. social and cultural norms,
b. typical story forms,
c. imitation of and variation on tradition, and
d. surprising plot twists.

The conclusion will summarise these points and suggest why Luke concentrated all these unexpected elements in this story at this point in his narrative about Jesus.

2. Unexpected Social/Cultural Elements: A Gentile Centurion in Capernaum?

The social and cultural dynamics of this episode present a number of unexpected elements: a centurion in small Capernaum, a gentile in a Jewish village, and the centurion's positive interactions with the Jewish leaders. Immediately after Luke's editorial note that Jesus had finished his public sermon and entered Capernaum (7:1), we are met somewhat awkwardly with the genitive noun ἑκατοντάρχου at the beginning of verse 2. This is attached to the subject of the sentence, δοῦλος,

11. Currie, *The Unexpected*, 19–20, 37–39. Currie's study is situated in a written culture, where readers know that the ending already exists and therefore has in some sense already happened even as they are reading the story. His insights into the general nature of 'the unexpected' are helpful, but they are tempered by applying them to the oral–scribal culture of the ancient Mediterranean.

and is Luke's first reference to a ἑκατοντάρχης in the Gospel. What are we to make of this centurion, and how is it that he is in Capernaum?[12] Luke's informed audience knows that Capernaum is a small Jewish village in Galilee (4:31) where Jesus had previously exorcised a demon in a Jewish synagogue (4:33-35). However, the village is little known, receiving just two passing mentions in Josephus (*J. W.* 3.519 and *Life* 1.403). Across the Septuagint traditions, ἑκατοντάρχης is used for a commander of approximately one hundred men (Exod 18:25; Num 31:14; 1 Sam 22:7; 2 Kgdms 11:14; etc.). It seems odd that a commander of up to a hundred soldiers would be found in a little-known hamlet in the region of Galilee. Such a military presence could have functioned to collect customs (see the combination of τελῶναι and στρατευόμενοι at Luke 3:12-14) or to offer basic policing.[13] Yet a garrison of approximately one hundred soldiers would have been unsustainable overkill for a village like Capernaum, with a population of only 600 to 1,500.[14] Already, we run into a socially unexpected scenario – a commander of a substantial military unit located in a small and remote town.

Next, what are we to make of the ethnicity of this centurion? He is clearly a gentile, in the light of verses 5 and 9.[15] Every other use of 'centurion' in Luke-Acts

12. Debate has also circulated around the possibility that the δοῦλος/παῖς was a homosexual partner of the centurion. This is argued for by David B. Gowler, 'Text, Culture, and Ideology in Luke 7:1-10: A Dialogic Reading', in *Fabrics of Discourse: Essays in Honor of Vernon K. Robbins*, ed. David B. Gowler, Gregory L. Bloomquist, and Duane F. Watson (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 89–125, and Theodore W. Jennings and Tat-Siong Benny Liew, 'Mistaken Identities but Model Faith: Rereading the Centurion, the Chap, and the Christ in Matthew 8:5-13', *JBL* 123 (2004): 467–494, https://doi.org/10.2307/3268043. However, see the rebuttal by D. B. Saddington, 'The Centurion in Matthew 8:5-13: Consideration of the Proposal of Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. and Tat-Siong Benny Liew', *JBL* 125 (2006): 140–142, https://doi.org/10.2307/27638351. The evidence is not clear. Even if some or many Roman centurions had homosexual relationships, that does not mean that every centurion did. Such a relationship, if known, would be incongruent with the Jewish elders' affirmation of the centurion's worthiness in 7:4-5. The enslaved man is 'dear (ἔντιμος)', to the centurion, but this adjective has a wide range of meanings from 'distinguished' (Luke 14:8) to 'honourable' (Phil 2:29) to 'valued' (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.243) to 'useful' (Lucian, *Par.* 13). No more specific relationship is implied or required by the story, and emphasising it would distract from the point of the story.

13. John Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1989), 316.

14. Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 152. Meyers and Strange put the population at 1,000 in Eric Meyers and James F. Strange, *Archaeology, the Rabbis, and Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 58. Capernaum may have had increased trade and travel significance as a satellite town of Bethsaida after 30 CE, but it was not on a major trade route (Reed, *Archaeology*, 146).

15. Catchpole is a lone voice arguing that the centurion would have been understood as a Jew and not a gentile in Q. See David R. Catchpole, 'The Centurion's Faith and Its

refers to a Roman military official,[16] although it is possible for ἑκατοντάρχης to be used of non-Roman military commanders (as in the LXX; also Josephus, *Ant.* 9.143, 148, 151). Yet there is no historical record of Roman forces in Galilee during the time of Jesus.[17] This centurion could have been construed as part of Herodian forces and of foreign origin,[18] especially since the Herodian military borrowed Roman practices.[19] His precise ethnic and military identity is not deployed in the course of the story, but the informed audience of the narrative world of Luke-Acts might have assumed a Roman background despite the possible anachronism.[20] Most importantly for this story, the centurion is a gentile. Luke has intimated revelation for the gentiles (2:32) and Jesus has once spoken positively about ancient Hebrew prophets' positive interaction with gentiles (4:25-27). However, Luke has characterised Jesus's mission as travelling to (Jewish) synagogues (4:44). This is the first gentile whom Jesus encounters, and the only other gentiles Jesus will interact with in Luke's Gospel before his trial are the demon-possessed man and other people of the Gerasenes (8:26-39).[21] While there were substantial gentile

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Function in Q', in *The Four Gospels 1992*, ed. F. van Segbroeck et al., BETL 100 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), vol. 1, 517–540.

16. Luke 23:47; Acts 10:1,22; 21:32; 22:25,26; 23:17,23; 24:23; 27:1,6,11,31,43. Luke doubly certifies Cornelius's Roman identity by placing him in Caesarea Maritima (the seat of Roman government; Acts 10:2) and stating that he was of the Italian cohort (Acts 10:1). The vast majority of references in Josephus also use ἑκατοντάρχης for a Roman official (e.g. *Ant.* 14.69; 18.229; *J. W.* 2.63; 4.37; 6.81).

17. Mark A. Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus*, SNTSMS 134 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 50, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511487910, and Reed, *Archaeology*, 162.

18. A full defence of this is found in Chancey, *Greco-Roman*, 51–53. Herodian forces are mentioned in Josephus *Ant.* 17.215 and 18.114. Derrett refers to him in passing as a 'Herodian centurion'. See J. Duncan M. Derrett, 'Law in the New Testament: The Syro-Phoenician Woman and the Centurion of Capernaum', *NovT* 15 (1973): 161–186, 174, https://doi.org/10.1163/156853673X00015. Several other commentators follow this line: François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, Hermeneia, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. Christine M. Thomas (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 259; Schürmann, *Lukasevangelium: Erster Teil*, 391; Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 316; and Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20*, 649.

19. David Kennedy, 'Roman Army', *ABD*, vol. 5, 789–798 (794).

20. Several interpreters have argued or assumed that this centurion is a Roman officer, including Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 284–285; Gowler, 'Text, Culture', 89–125, 106–109; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 209–211; and John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 159–163.

21. Luke either omits or does not know of the story of the gentile woman of Mark 7:24-30 and the healing of the deaf man in the gentile region of the Decapolis in Mark 7:31-37. One could perhaps add Jesus's positive encounter with a Samaritan man with leprosy, whom Jesus calls a 'foreigner (ἀλλογενής)', in 17:16-18.

populations in cities near Capernaum,[22] 'nothing in the literary or archaeological record suggests that such [Jew–gentile] contact was especially frequent', and it was perhaps rarer in smaller villages.[23] Therefore, Jesus encountering a gentile centurion in the village of Capernaum is unexpected. The sudden introduction of this rather out-of-place character in this rather unlikely location grabs the audience's attention.

Finally, this would be one of only a few instances in Luke-Acts where non-Christian Jewish characters have such a positive relationship with gentiles. Most Jew-gentile interactions in Luke-Acts are utilitarian and/or negative. Luke portrays the violent reaction of the Jewish crowd in Nazareth when Jesus makes positive comments about gentiles (4:28-29). The Jewish leadership only approaches Pilate in Luke 23:1-2 in order to get him to condemn and execute Jesus. Similarly, the Jewish elders only come to Felix in Caesarea to accuse Paul (Acts 24:1). In Acts, groups of Jews respond negatively to gentile interest in the message about Jesus (13:44-46; 14:2; 17:5). Ethnic divisions and even hostility between Jews and gentiles are often assumed in Luke's narrative (Luke 21:24; Acts 10:28; 11:3; 22:21-22; see also Josephus, *Ant*. 12.120 and *J. W.* 2.488). We do see moments of cooperation, but usually when Jews and gentiles unite against the followers of Jesus as a common enemy (e.g. Acts 4:27; 14:15).[24] In contrast, the centurion is portrayed as winning over the local Jewish community because of his benefaction, donating funds to have the synagogue built. One could claim that this centurion is acting as a shrewd military leader by using civic euergetism to generate reciprocity and facilitate good relations with local Jewish leadership for utilitarian reasons.[25] However, the Jewish leaders do not cast his gifts in this way. They say his generous gifts

22. Reed, *Archaeology*, 162–163.

23. The quote is from Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, SNTSMS 118 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 166, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511487927. While large cities have evidence of mixed population, smaller villages (like Capernaum) seem to have been much more closed to outside influence. See Mordechai Aviam, *Jews, Pagans, and Christians in the Galilee: Land of Galilee 1* (Rochester, NY: Institute of Galilean Archaeology, 2004), 20–21.

24. Jew–gentile relations in the first century stretched across a diverse spectrum from engagement to avoidance to hostility, as shown in the chapters of David C. Sim and James S. McLaren, eds., *Attitudes to Gentiles in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, LNTS (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). Luke's opus tends toward the negative side of this spectrum.

25. As was often done in civic euergetism, so John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 32–35. We hear no hint of any competition among social leaders or pressure from Jewish clients as discussed in Halvor Moxnes, 'Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts', in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 249–50.

were out of 'love (ἀγαπάω)' for the Jewish people (7:4; and not 'love of honour (φιλοτιμία)' as is common with benefaction).[26] It is reasonable that a centurion would make enough money for such a benefaction. We do have evidence of other centurions performing similar benefactions (Cornelius in Acts 10:2; as well as *IGRR*[27] 4.786 and AGRW[28] 332, both third century), and there is limited evidence of non-Jews donating funds for Jewish religious structures (*OGIS* 96; AGRW 145; and 'those who worship God' in Josephus, *Ant.* 14.110), but benefaction across ethnic and religious boundaries was still unusual.[29] We find many instances of generosity and gifts within ethnic or religious groups in Acts (2:44, 4:32–34, 9:36–40, 10:2, 11:27–30), but generosity that crosses ethnic or religious boundaries is portrayed as exceptional or difficult (cf. the shocking example of the Good Samaritan in 10:25–37 and the problems with food distribution in Acts 6:1–6) The Jewish 'elders (πρεσβυτέρους)' (v. 3) would have been seen as local leaders embodying Jewish identity and tradition.[30] Yet, they have enough loyalty toward this gentile centurion benefactor to be willing to be 'sent' by him like clients and to speak to Jesus 'earnestly (σπουδαίως)' on his behalf (v. 4). Thus, a group of Jewish elders on such friendly terms with a gentile centurion benefactor that they would come and plead with Jesus to heal his servant would have been relatively surprising for the informed audience of Luke-Acts. This type of thing does not happen in Luke's narrative world and only infrequently in the broader historical milieu. The portrayal of this gentile centurion in Capernaum who has won over the Jewish community by his benefactions runs upstream against social and cultural dynamics, contributing to the unexpected features of this story.

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26. Wegner, *Der Hauptmann*, 63.

27. R. L. Cagnat et al., eds., *Inscriptiones graecae ad res romanas pertinentes*, 4 vols. (Paris: Leroux, 1911–1927).

28. Richard A. Ascough, Philip A. Harland, and John S. Kloppenborg, 'Associations in the Greco-Roman World', http://www.philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/.

29. Some have argued that Roman understandings and practices of patronage and benefaction were different from Jewish understandings and practices of community charity. Benefaction did not translate from Roman to Jewish culture easily. See Seth Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society?: Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 15–26, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400830985, and Erlend D. MacGillivray, 'Re-evaluating Patronage and Reciprocity in Antiquity and New Testament Studies', *JGRChJ* 6 (2009): 37–81, esp. 67–80.

30. Despite debates on the translation of Ἰουδαῖοι, the best translation for the use of this term in 7:3 is 'Jews' as it refers to a religious identity ('our synagogue') and not a geographical designation.

3. Unexpected Forms: What Kind of Story Is This?

The literary form of this story exhibits unusual elements that present several unexpected dynamics to keep the audience's interest. The story begins like a typical miracle account with the presentation of a sick/disabled/demon-possessed person juxtaposed with the presence of Jesus (7:2-3). It also ends with the healing of the centurion's servant (v. 10).[31] Others have focused on the final statement in verse 9 as the appropriate climax of what should be construed as a pronouncement story or chreia.[32] Still others say that this episode is some kind of mixture of miracle and pronouncement forms, with the pronouncement elements emphasised by Luke's editing.[33] Tannehill has put it in his own category of the 'quest story', where another character approaches Jesus with some critical need, usually climaxing with a declaration from Jesus (e.g. 5:17-26; 7:36-50; 19:1-10),[34] but Tannehill also recognises ways in which 7:1-10 does not fit the quest story paradigm.[35] This story, especially in its Lukan version, falls into the cracks between various literary forms – a dynamic that does not allow the audience to settle into expectations about flow and components common to any one form.

In addition to this unusual mixing of forms, there are other formally unexpected elements that keep the audience intrigued. First, a healing does occur in this story. However, it is a healing that lacks any body-to-body contact (contrast 4:40; 5:13; 8:54; 13:13) and any authoritative word from Jesus (contrast 4:35; 5:24; 6:10; 7:14; 8:54; 17:14; 18:42). This healing at a distance is almost unparalleled in Luke-Acts.[36] Next, a miracle/exorcism story often closes with a

31. See Ulrich Busse, *Die Wunder des Propheten Jesus: Die Rezeption, Komposition, und Interpretation der Wundertradition im Evangelium des Lukas*, FB 24 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1979), 151 and Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, ed. John Riches, trans. Francis McDonagh (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 321.

32. Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 38–39. Both Fitzmyer (*Luke I–IX*, 649–650) and Nolland (*Luke 1:1–9:20*, 314) acknowledge it as a pronouncement story with significant modifications.

33. Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevanglium*, HNT 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 269 and Bovon, *Luke 1*, 264. Bock (*Luke 1:1–9:50*, 633) says 'The form of the account is variously understood.'

34. Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. Volume 1: The Gospel According to Luke*, ed. Robert W. Funk, FF (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 111–126.

35. The issue is not raised by the objection of a third party, and the centurion makes a long speech (Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Vol. 1*, 114–115). To this, we would add that the story ends with a note on the healing and not a word from Jesus (contrast 5:26, 7:50, and 19:10).

36. As somewhat similar instances to this healing from a distance, one could cite the woman with the bleeding disorder who merely touches Jesus's clothes (8:42-48), the healings caused by Peter's shadow (Acts 5:15), and the 'unheard of miracles (δύναμις τε οὐ

report of the public amazement of the crowd that witnessed it (5:26; 7:16; 8:25; 8:56; 9:43; 18:43), but this story closes with only the few friends returning to find the enslaved man in good health (v. 10). In this story, it is not the crowds that are amazed by Jesus's power, as with a typical miracle story (e.g. 4:22; 9:43), but Jesus who is 'amazed (ἐθαύμασεν)' at the faith of the centurion (v. 9) – a reaction that he has nowhere else in the Gospel of Luke.[37] This surprising reaction may refocus attention on the faith of the centurion as the real miracle of the story. Finally, if this episode has features of a pronouncement story, whose pronouncement is most important? Jesus has the final (brief) word in verse 9, but the story features the long and insightful statement of the centurion that uses a parable-like analogy much as Jesus typically does (vv. 6-8; cf. 5:36-38; 6:43-45; 7:41-42). Despite the many differences between the Matthaean and Lukan versions of this story, this long quotation of the centurion is almost identical in both accounts, reinforcing this statement as the primary pronouncement of the story (cf. Luke 7:6b-8 and Matt 8:8b-10).[38] Both the unexpected mixed form and the surprising absence or shifting of other formal elements contribute to the story gaining and holding the audience's attention.

4. Unexpected Mimesis: Imitation or Variation?

Scholars have generally agreed that Luke participated in the widespread practice of mimesis, found throughout the Hellenistic literature of his day.[39] More specifically, it is recognised that in 7:1-10 Luke is imitating Elisha's healing of Naaman as recorded in 2 Kings 5 and that in 7:11-17 he is imitating Elijah's raising

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τὰς τυχούσας)' caused by mere contact with cloth that had touched Paul's skin (Acts 19:11-12). However, each of these cases still employ some kind of mediated contact.

37. The only other time that Jesus is 'amazed (ἐθαύμαζεν)' in the synoptic tradition is at the people's lack of faith in Mark 6:6. See also Michel Berder, 'Surprise, étonnement, admiration? Observations sur l'usage du verbe *thaumazô* dans le récit de Luc-Actes', in *La Surprise dans la Bible: Hommage à Camille Focant*, BETL 247 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 277–296, 290.

38. The only differences are the missing μόνον in Luke 7:6 and the missing τασσόμενος in Matt 8:9. In contrast, Jesus's brief statement in Luke 7:9 has οὐδέ instead of Matthew's παρ' οὐδενί (8:10) and the remaining words are the same but in a different order.

39. Eckhard Plümacher, *Lukas als hellenistischer Schriftseller: Studien zur Apostelgeschichte*, SUNT 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 38–71; Octavian Baban, *On the Road Encounters in Luke-Acts: Hellenistic Mimesis and Luke's Theology of the Way*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 18–25; and Dennis R. MacDonald, *Luke and Vergil: Imitations of Classical Greek Literature*, The New Testament and Greek Literature Vol. II (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 1–5.

of the widow's son as recorded in 1 Kings 17:17-24.[40] The pairing of these two stories in Luke along with their corresponding mimetic echoes is signaled to the audience in 4:25-27. Both 7:1-10 and 2 Kings 5 deal with a famous Israelite prophet who is sought out by a foreign/gentile military commander for a healing. Servants play a key role in both stories. In both cases, the healing is performed at a distance after various exchanges through Jewish intermediaries. The echoes of 2 Kings 5 in 7:1-10 are undeniable, and this is complemented by the even more extensive connections between 7:11-17 (the raising of the widow's son at Nain) and 1 Kings 17 in the immediately following pericope. Luke's audience would naturally call up the story of Elisha and Naaman when hearing about Jesus and this centurion, especially in light of the way that they had been primed to do so with Jesus's words in 4:27.

Mimesis is not mere imitation, though. It is a creative and intentional re-presentation of the familiar elements along with the new.[41] Luke incorporates several novel and creative variations in his telling of this story of Jesus (an Israelite prophet) and the centurion (a gentile military commander). First, it is the man enslaved to the centurion and not the centurion himself who is ill and healed. The enslaved man's condition is life threatening, according to Luke (7:2), and there is no mention of any skin disease. Naaman's skin disease was distressing but not fatal, and the enslaved person in Matthew 8:6 is said to be paralysed. The enslaved Jewish girl, Naaman's servants, and Elisha's servant Gehazi play key roles as intermediaries in the 2 Kings story. Yet, in Luke's mimetic retelling, the intermediary role is fulfilled by Jewish elders and the centurion's friends, who are much more honourable/elite in status. In contrast, the enslaved man in Luke 7 is relegated to the background, never seen nor heard in the narrative. While both healings occur at a distance, the Elisha story employs washing in (dirty) water as a physical means of cleansing/healing, while the mere possibility of Jesus's word

40. For example, see Gowler, 'Text, Culture', 104–105 and Green, *Luke*, 284. The mimesis is even more pronounced in 7:11-17. See Thomas Lewis Brodie, 'Towards Unravelling Luke's Use of the Old Testament: Luke 7.11-17 as an *Imitatio* of 1 Kings 17.17-24', *NTS* 32 (1986): 247–267, 250–257, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500013084.

41. Ricoeur says that mimesis is better understood as 'creative imitation' that opens new spaces for stories. See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 45 and 68, https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226713519.001.0001. Bonz notes that mimesis prompts the audience to recognise both 'the model *and* the divergences', but the divergences are more numerous and critical here than in the paired story in 7:11-17. See Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 171.

suffices in Luke. Finally, while Naaman confesses that 'there is no God in all the earth except in Israel' (2 Kgs 5:15), he still asks for a special dispensation to be able to bow down before the idol of Rimmon (5:18). Luke's (gentile) centurion has more faith than anyone in Israel (7:9), and he needs no special exceptions granted to him like the one found in 2 Kings. The positive portrayal of the centurion exceeds even that of Naaman. As a note of contrast, the similarities between 1 Kings 17 and the next story in 7:11-17 are striking and numerous, with just a few purposeful divergences.[42] In 7:1-10, Luke creatively shifts characters/roles, presents a different version of the problem and healing, varies all the modes of mediation, and offers an even more positive presentation of the centurion. The number and weight of these changes add to the unexpected nature of this story, especially around the central and highly positive role of the centurion.

5. Unexpected Plot Twists: Where Is This Story Going?

This is one of only a few stories in Luke's presentation of the public ministry of Jesus in which some character other than Jesus is the protagonist.[43] The centurion initiates the action by reaching out to Jesus through the Jewish elders as emissaries.[44] This causes Jesus to come to him. The centurion initiates again by sending a second delegation. The centurion is given the longest quote in the story (vv. 6b-8), and the closing word is about the amazing faith of the centurion and not about Jesus or the kingdom (v. 9; contrast the conclusion of other 'quest stories' in 5:24; 7:49; 18:23; 19:10; 23:43). Thus, 7:1-10 has little explicit Christological import and is much more focused on the person of the centurion – his actions, his words, and his character. This is quite unusual for Luke's narrative, making the character of the centurion stand out all the more for the audience.

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42. Brodie, 'Towards', 257–259. There are several key similarities between Luke and 1 Kgs here – meeting at the gate, the widow's son dies, the dead son vocalises, the son is given to his mother, recognition of the prophet – but only a few minor differences that fit Luke's narrative (e.g. Nain rather than Zarephath; a public procession rather than a private upper room).

43. Something close to this is the key characteristic of a 'quest story' for Tannehill: 'In the synoptic quest story someone approaches Jesus in quest of something important to human well-being' (Tannehill, *Narrative Unity, Vol. 1*, 111). He identifies seven of these in Luke: 5:17-26; 7:2-10; 7:36-50; 17:12-19; 18:18-23; 19:1-10; and 23:39-43. While other characters initiate the action in each of these stories, none of them feature multiple directives and long quotation like those attributed here to the centurion, as noted by Tannehill himself (*Narrative Unity, Vol. 1*, 115).

44. Bovon (*Luke 1*, 264) notes that the centurion is the 'main character' of the story, but not how unusual this is in Luke's narrative about Jesus.

Finally, the plot of this story has surprising twists in it. Above, we considered how the initial setting of the story (a gentile centurion in Capernaum who was a benefactor to the local Jewish community) was already rather unusual. The Jewish elders come to Jesus stressing that this man is 'worthy (ἄξιος)' of Jesus's miraculous intervention. Jesus heeds their appeal and proceeds on his way to the centurion's home (v. 6a). This is already quite surprising, given the largely negative portrayal of Jewish leaders in Luke-Acts and Jesus's tense interactions with them.[45] Jesus sets out for the centurion's home, priming the audience to anticipate Jesus arriving at the house and healing the enslaved man. However, at the last minute, when Jesus is 'not far from the house' (v. 6), a second and completely unexpected delegation appears. Now, through his 'friends', the centurion directly contradicts what the Jewish elders have said: he is, in fact, not 'worthy (ἱκανός)' of Jesus coming to his house (v. 6).[46] The initial argument (that the centurion was worthy) and the initial direction of the story (toward the centurion's house) have been totally upended by the second delegation. The second delegation provides a feasible, if unexpected, explanation of the redirection of the story (cf. Aristotle, *Poet.* 1452.6-8). The second delegation also reports the centurion's reasoning, drawing an analogy between his authority and Jesus's authority (vv. 7-8). It is this unexpected twist in the plot that leads to Jesus's amazement and his startling proclamation of this centurion's unique faith (v. 9). The healing is reported in verse 10 almost as an afterthought. This unexpected delegation changes the story from a focus on healing to a focus on pronouncements by the centurion and Jesus. The surprising plot twists created by the two different delegations keeps the audience intensely engaged in the flow and denouement of the story.

6. Conclusion: The Rhetorical Force of the Unexpected

The preceding analysis has demonstrated four types of unexpected elements that saturate Luke's account of Jesus and the gentile centurion (7:1-10). Several social and cultural norms are disrupted. A gentile (and Roman?) military commander of a substantial regiment is located in a small Jewish village. This centurion has also donated funds to the local Jewish religious institution, and the local Jewish leaders are surprisingly positive toward him, even serving as his eager emissaries.

45. Green, *Luke*, 287.

46. Others have noted that the reversal in the centurion's worthiness is used by Luke to emphasise his humility (Gagnon, 'Luke's Motives', 141; Schürmann, *Lukasevangelium: Erster Teil*, 393).

The form of the story denies easy classification. It seems at first like a miracle story about a mortally ill man enslaved to a centurion, but transforms into more of a pronouncement story. However, it is not the saying of Jesus that climaxes the account. Rather, the reported statement of the centurion stands out for its length and insight, with a passing mention of the healing at the end. The crowd is not amazed at Jesus's power. Instead, Jesus stands amazed at the centurion's faith. Next, Luke prompts his audience to expect the mimesis of Elisha's healing of Naaman, but he retains only a few key elements and includes several novel variations throughout the story (e.g. healing of the slave rather than the commander, and portraying the centurion in an entirely positive way). Finally, Luke recounts a story of two different delegations – a surprisingly positive first delegation of Jewish elders who argue for the centurion's worthiness and a second delegation of friends through whom the centurion startlingly asserts his lack of worth. This all draws our attention to the centurion as the protagonist in this story about Jesus. The unexpected elements in 7:1-10 are both many and variegated.

What then is the rhetorical force of all these unexpected elements in this brief story? Why did Luke bring them together here, and what impact might they have had on his audience(s)? First, the rhetoricians surveyed above noted the ways that unexpected elements heighten emotions in the audience (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.2.11), bring delight in the hearing of a story (Cicero, *Part. Or.* 9.32), and capture the audience's attention (Cicero, *Orat.* 3.207 and Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.1.35). Thus, the surprising aspects of this story display Luke's skill as a storyteller, recounting a particular tradition about Jesus in a way that is appealing and engaging for his readers and listeners.

Second, this story is paired with the one that follows. While the next story stays with most social, cultural, formal, and narrative conventions, it does narrate the astounding event of a person being raised from the dead by Jesus. The audience has already heard of Jesus healing/exorcising many people in the Gospel (4:31-37; 5:12-16; 5:17-26; 6:6-11). The healing of the centurion's slave is striking in that it occurs at a distance with no bodily contact, but Luke needs to amplify the impact of this story through additional surprising elements to bring it up to the level of raising the dead (cf. Cicero, *Part. Or.* 21.73 and Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.1.107). In Luke's narrative, 7:1-10 and 7:11-15 work together to lead the people to identify Jesus as 'a great prophet' and the manifestation of God's visitation of the people (7:16).[47]

47. Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 276.

Third, Luke's audience has just sat through a rather substantive pause in the narrative, listening to the epitome of Jesus's teachings collected in the Sermon on the Plain (6:17-49). Luke uses the many unexpected aspects of this story to recapture his audience's attention if it has waned during the extended sequence of ethical precepts (*Rhet. ad Her.* 1.6.10) and to refocus their attention with the shift back to narrated events (Quintilian, *Inst*. 8.6.51).

Fourth, the unexpected elements of this story stand alongside other unexpected references to gentiles in Luke's narrative so far. Prophecies about Jesus emphasise his salvific significance for Israel (1:32-33,54,69), and Jesus's mission is to proclaim the kingdom in the synagogues of Judea (4:43-44). Thus, an *uninformed* audience would be caught off guard when Simeon calls the infant Jesus 'a light of revelation to the gentiles' (2:31) and when Jesus cites the examples of Naaman and the widow of Zarephath (4:24-27). These occasional, surprising, positive, and underexplained references to gentiles continue with this exceptional centurion. An audience encountering the narrative sequentially for the first time may start to infer that these unexpected appearances of gentiles will eventually play a role in the larger story.

Finally, the *informed* audience of Luke-Acts knows that Luke will eventually come to present and support the church's mission to the gentiles in Acts. Jesus has very few interactions with gentiles in his public ministry: only this centurion and a handful of others in the country of the Gerasenes (8:26-39). Luke needs a way to anchor and underscore the validity of the gentile mission in the ministry of Jesus, and this story provides him with a means to do that.[48] Yet, there is a lot of narrative between 7:1-10 and the beginnings of the gentile mission in the middle of Acts. The many unexpected elements of this story of Jesus and this exemplary gentile centurion help to make the point more forcefully to the audience and cement it in their memory (Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.2.22 and 9.4.90). Thus, the concentration of unexpected elements in his story has a rhetorical force that intensifies this episode, contributes to the flow of this section of Luke's Gospel, and supports thematic development across Luke-Acts.

48. Wilson has noted how 7:1-10 provides a pragmatic justification for the mission to the gentiles. See Stephen G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts*, SNTSMS 23 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 31–32, 176–177, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511659638.

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