

“A Ghost Does Not Have Flesh and Bones”: An Apotropaic Reading of Luke 24:36-43

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Abstract

Previous scholarship on Luke 24:36–43 has concentrated primarily on features such as manuscript differences, post-Easter theology, and the development and sources of the Gospel writer, among other issues. Little attention, however, has been given to some of the more peculiarly “magical” features of this passage. Luke’s mention of Jesus appearing as a spirit/ghost and his desire to consume a piece of broiled fish alerts the reader to an apotropaic reading of this scene. In addition to contributing to an anti-docetic apologetic, this story also demonstrates that Jesus was not an *evil* spirit. This article explores the apotropaic function of fish within Luke’s narrative by comparing it with the apotropaic use of fish in the Jewish book of Tobit and the *Greek Magical Papyri*. This apotropaic reading of the text allows for Luke’s subtle narrative strategy to implicate the disciples for their unbelief and further demonstrates the author’s knowledge of Greco-Roman religious ideas.

Introduction

The post-resurrection appearance of Jesus in Luke 24:36–43 contains a number of peculiar narrative elements not found in the other Synoptic Gospels or John.¹ Unlike Matthew and Mark, Jesus’s appearance to the disciples in Luke causes them to react in “terror” (πτοέω).² Indeed, Matthew and Mark do not even mention this episode, while John only records that Jesus “showed them his hands and his

1 François Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James Crouch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 387: “By general agreement, however, vv. 44–49 carry the mark of the evangelist. This statement is true for both the manner of expression and the themes. Nevertheless, some elements of this last speech of Christ are not especially Lukan: principally the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins as expressions of salvation.”

2 Ɱ⁷⁵ and Codex Vaticanus (B = 03) use the verb θποέω.

side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (20:20).³ According to Luke, however, the disciples perceive this appearance to be the manifestation of a spirit (πνεῦμα) or ghost (φάντασμα).⁴ In order to ease their discomfort, the risen Jesus provides three evidences that he is not a spirit: 1) sight (“look at my hands and my feet”; v.39); 2) physical touch (“Touch me and see”; v. 39); 3) and the consumption of food (“have you anything to eat?”; v. 41). Jesus’s proofs are premised on the idea that “a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (v. 39).⁵ Finally, after the disciples give Jesus a piece of “broiled fish” (ἰχθύος ὀπτοῦ; v. 42),⁶ he then commissions them to go share his message.

Previous studies of the narrative found in Luke 24:36–49 have primarily concerned themselves with differences within the manuscript tradition and their post-Easter theological importance,⁷ the development and sources of Luke’s narrative,⁸ and pinpointing the original geographical location of this story (Galilee or Jerusalem).⁹ Little attention, however, has been given to the possible apotropaic characteristics of this passage.¹⁰ By reading this pericope within the broader cultural and

3 Though John’s account might suggest that the disciples only became “glad” (ἐχάρησαν) after realizing Jesus was not a hostile spirit, it is only Luke’s account that spells out the reason for their turmoil. The reason for the fear of the disciples is told to us in John 20:19 and is a fear of persecution from the Jews. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John i-xii and John xiii-xxi, 29 and 29a* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966, 1970), 1020.

4 The word φάντασμα is found in Codex Bezae (D = 05). See BDAG, s.v. “φάντασμα.”

5 The later midrash *Ruth Rabbah* contains a similar sentiment: “And he [Boaz] turned himself” she [Ruth] clasped him like ivy and he began to touch her hair, and said ‘spirits do not have hair’ and so he said to her ‘who are you,’ a spirit or a woman” (6:1). Likewise, Odysseus’ attempt to hug the spirit of his dead mother results in her stating: “for muscles no longer have flesh and bones” (σάρκας τε καὶ οστέα; Od. 11.204–22; cf. Aen. 2.768–95).

6 The pairing ἰχθύος ὀπτοῦ includes the *hapax legomenon* ὀπτός, which can mean “roasted,” “baked,” “forged,” “scorched,” or “broiled” though a homograph of ὀπτός exists that means “visible,” from the verb ὀράω (Luc. Lex. 9, Ath. 8.338c.). It is doubtful, however, that Luke is trying to create a play on words here about the visible Christ (although perceived as a ghostly, transient being) and the fish. See BDAG, s.v., “ὀπτός.”

7 Some manuscripts include the phrase “and some honeycomb” alongside the fish that Jesus eats. Bovon, *Luke 3*, 392 notes that “we know that in antiquity fish and honey often appeared on the communion tables along with bread and wine. Since honey was also regarded as paradisiacal food, we cannot rule out an eschatological connotation.” See also E. Nestle, “The Honeycomb in Luke xxiv,” *ExpTim* 22 (1910–1911): 567–68; G. D. Kilpatrick, “Luke 24:42–43,” *NovT* 28 (1986):306–308. The Italian scholar, Beatrice Cherubini has written an extensive dissertation about this passage: Beatrice Cherubini, “‘Mangiò pesce e miele’: Un’ antica tradizione sul Risorto” (PhD diss., Università di Roma Tre, 2005–2006).

8 Gerald O’Collins, “Did Jesus Eat the Fish (Luke 24:42–43)?” *Gregorianum* 69.1 (1988): 65–76, for example, looks at three stages of the development of this pericope and its function in the life of the early Church: “Luke himself (stage three of the tradition) uses the fish-eating motif as one of his means for expressing at least three things: a) the bodily reality of the risen Lord; b) the qualifications of the apostles as witnesses and c) the ongoing liturgical presence of the Lord” (76).

9 See, for example, the older studies of J. M. Creed, *St Luke* (London: Macmillan, 1930), 299; E. Klostermann, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HKNT; Tübingen, 1929), 241.

10 Michael J Morris, *Warding Off Evil* (WUNT 2/451; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017) gives almost no attention to this pericope in his recent monograph on the topic of apotropaism in the New Testament. The examination that comes closest to dealing with the current topic is Deborah Thompson Prince, “The ‘Ghost’ of Jesus: Luke 24 in Light of Ancient Narratives of Post-Mortem

religious framework of apotropaic rituals found in early Judaism and Greco-Roman magical techniques, I argue that Jesus's tactic of eating broiled fish in this narrative is not only a polemic against docetic beliefs,¹¹ but is also a natural Second Temple Jewish response to the disciples' terror.

This study will begin with acclimating the reader to the use of apotropaic objects in early Judaism. In the following sections I will analyze how fish were used in expelling and supplying apotropaic protection to Tobias and Sarah in the Jewish book of Tobit. Afterwards, I will conduct a survey of some of the uses of fish in rituals found from the *Greek Magical Papyri*. Next, we will turn to the kind of spirits that Jews in the first century might have been concerned about and in turn how such spirits were dealt with in Greco-Roman sources. Finally, I will apply this apotropaic understanding to the narrative of Luke 24:36–43 and demonstrate how it contributes to reading the pericope as a whole.

Apotropaic Objects in Early Judaism

Second Temple literature reflects a growing concern among Jews for protection against, and deliverance from, evil spirits. Defense against these malevolent forces came in various forms. A handful of texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls, for example, contain an assortment of anti-demonic prayers, songs, and rituals (e.g., 11Q11). These activities included curses aimed towards demons and their leaders (e.g., 4Q280, 4Q286 7 II, 1–12), praise to God intended to frighten away evil spirits (e.g., 4Q510 1 1–9 = 4Q511 10 1), and rules for community members to obey in order to resist the influence of evil powers (e.g., 1QS I, 16–19, CD XII, 2–6; XVI, 4–6). The Scrolls portray the covenant community as participants in a

Apparitions,” JSNT 29.3 (2008): 287–301. Yet, Prince does not discuss the topic of eating fish in the article, but see pp. 290–91 where she briefly talks about funerary rites and libations and food offerings. Jake H. O’Connell, “Did Greco-Roman Apparitional Models Influence Luke’s Resurrection Narrative? A Response to Deborah Thompson Prince,” JGRChJ 5 (2008): 198 has offered a response to Prince’s article that is also worth noting: “We need, however, to return to the question of whether Luke contains any indications of non-Jewish Greco-Roman ideas about apparitions. This passage does seem to provide one such example. Since the ability or inability of ghosts to eat is a question addressed in Greco-Roman literature, this together with Luke’s reference to Jesus’s flesh and blood as a possible allusion to Homer’s Od. 11.204–22, can be taken as evidence that Luke is indeed interacting with Greco-Roman ideas of apparitions in this passage. However, there should be two caveats here. First, Judaism had its own stories of ghosts, and Palestine, while avoiding outright syncretism with pagan religious beliefs, was still significantly influenced by Greco-Roman culture. Thus, one cannot be sure the notion of ghosts not having flesh and blood and being unable to eat was confined to Greco-Roman conceptions of ghosts.”

- 11 Jack Finegan, *Die Überlieferung der Leidens- und Auferstehungsgeschichte Jesu* (Giessen, 1934), 91; Vincent Taylor, *The Passion Narrative of St Luke: A Critical and Historical Investigation*, ed. Owen E. Evans (SNTSMS 19; Cambridge: University Press, 1972), 112–14; Jürgen Roloff, *Das Kerygma und der irdische Jesus: Historische Motive in den Jesus-Erzählungen der Evangelien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 255.

cosmic war against the head demonic force Belial and his lot.¹² The community members actively confess sin (1QS I, 24), curse Belial and his human and demonic lot (1QS II, 1–10; 1QM XIII, 2–5; 4Q286 7 II, 1–5), and supplicate God to protect them from evil spirits (4Q511 10, 9–11).¹³

Besides the use of curses, prayers, and songs, physical objects were used to protect oneself from evil spirits as well, such as written amulets¹⁴ and botanical substances.¹⁵ Josephus (*J.W.* 7.180–85), for example, describes a certain deadly plant that, when brought to a patient (“sick one”; νοσσοῦσι), “expels” (ἐξελαύνει) demons. No instructions are given on how to use the root, only that its deathly

12 Belial’s “lot” (גורל) can refer to human beings under his control (e.g., 1QS II, 1–10) or to evil spirits (4Q286 7a II, 1–6). See BDB, s.v., “גורל.”

13 Sometimes leaders in the community were the ones reciting prayers and songs to ward away evil. The Maskil (משכיל), for example, played an important role in the community and the term is usually translated as “instructor” or “sage” (e.g., 1QS III, 13; 1QSb I, 1; 1QM I, 1; 1QH^a XX, 14; CD XII, 21; 4Q510 I, 4). In some texts the Maskil is described as having received supernal knowledge and a position of spiritual authority within the community (1QS IX, 12–21; 4Q511 18 II, 8). This authority extends not only to the instruction of the community members about the nature of humanity and the cosmic war (1QS III, 13–IV, 26), but also to the warding off, aversion, or eviction of evil spirits (4Q510 I, 4–6). See Joseph Angel, “Maskil, Community, and Religious Experience in the Songs of the Sage (4Q510–511),” *DSD* 19.1 (2012): 1–27, who argues that apotropaism in 4QSongs of the Sage^{ab} is not actually a form of “magic,” but the result of the community’s transformed mind.

14 In 2019, a preliminary reconstruction, translation, and commentary of 4Q147 was supplied by Ariel and Faina Feldman. This work had been previously catalogued as a tefillin by J.T. Milik, who was unable to decipher the work on account of the handwriting which he described as “pratiquement indéchiffrable” (DJD 6, 37). The work contains the remains of language reminiscent of other apotropaic works found at Qumran and therefore has been suggested to be the remains of an amulet. Tefillin and mezuzot have sometimes been viewed as apotropaic by scholars. The tefillin and mezuzot consist of scriptural quotations affixed to the hand/forehead or doorpost based on the instruction of Exod 13:9, 16 and Deut 6:8; 11:18. The tefillin found at Qumran mostly follow the expected passages found in later rabbinic Judaism, namely Exod 13:10–16, Deut 6:4–9, and Deut 11:13–21, though some have been found to contain the ten commandments or other biblical texts (sometimes harmonized). The word Tefillin is often translated as phylactery, which suggests that it was used for protective purposes similar to amulets (perhaps they were amulets). 4Q560 was also found bound in a leather case similar to the tefillin which points towards a prophylactic use of scrolls. Yet, it is difficult to argue that the tefillin or mezuzot were apotropaic in nature, since the wearers were simply trying to keep the command found in the Hebrew Bible. See Yehudah Cohn, “Were Tefillin Phylacteries?” *JJS* 59 (2008): 39–61.

15 According to Josephus, the Essenes displayed “an extraordinary interest in the writings of the ancients, singling out in particular those which make for the welfare of soul and body; with the help of these, and with a view to the treatment of diseases, they make investigations into medicinal roots and the properties of stones” (*Ant.* 8.44). In this paper I adopt the consensus view that the repository of scrolls reflect the library of a sectarian group that studied, worshipped, and at different times lived at Qumran and reflects a group similar to, if not identical with, the Essenes referred to by ancient authors such as Josephus (*J.W.* 2.8.2–13; *Ant.* 5.13.9; 15.10.4–5), Philo (*Hypoth.* 11.1–18; *Prob.* 75–91), and Pliny (*Nat.* 5.15); For more on this topic, see James C. VanderKam, “Identity and History of the Community,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, 2 vols., eds. P. W. Flint and J. C. VanderKam (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 2:487–533. For a detailed history of the relationship between Qumran, the Essenes, and the Dead Sea scrolls in scholarship, see Gwynned de Looijer, *The Qumran Paradigm: A Critical Evaluation of Some Foundational Hypotheses in the Construction of the Qumran Sect* (Atlanta: SBL, 2015). Whether the Qumran Community ought to be associated with the Essenes or not, such a description of a group of Jews interested in the healing properties of plants and stones likely had magico-medical functions, some of which could have possibly been apotropaic.

powers are diminished when first picked, making them useful for expelling evil spirits. The root could have been worn as an amulet, pressed against the patient, used in fumigation, or possibly just had to be in the same vicinity as the individual.¹⁶ *Jubilees* 10:10-14 also preserves the apotropaic use of plant matter. After binding most of Mastema's spirits, God instructs the angels to teach Noah a series of healing rituals by using the "herbs of the earth." These herbs are able to heal both "illnesses" and "seductions" caused by the demons. They may have had both exorcistic and apotropaic powers. Since "healing" seems to infer that the target is already under demonic attack, we may presume that the herbs in this case were used for exorcism. The herbs are also used, however, so that "the evil spirits were restrained from following the sons of Noah" (10:13). This function is best understood as apotropaic, since the spirits are being thwarted from initiating contact with humans. How the herbs were used is not stated. They could have been worn as amulets, consumed, topically applied, used for fumigation, smudged, or any number of combinations, perhaps depending on what affliction needed to be dealt with.

The use of fumigation was a common tactic for dealing with evil spirits. In the later rabbinic work *Pirke de-Rab Kahana*, for example, it describes how Yohanan ben Zakai (first century CE) told a Gentile how to deal with demoniacs through fumigation with roots and pouring water over them.¹⁷ Likewise, Justin Martyr describes the Jewish and Gentile exorcists as using "fumigations and adjurations" (θυμιάμασι καὶ καταδέσμοις χρώνται; *Dial.* 85.3) in their rituals, contrasted by the Christian use of Jesus's name as a form of power-authority. Fumigation is also used in the Jewish book of Tobit to which we will now turn our attention.

Fish in the Book of Tobit

Among the items used for apotropaism in early Judaism and Greco-Roman rituals, fish was of particularly potent power.¹⁸ One of the most iconic stories we have from the Second Temple Period of an apotropaic object is Tobias' use of the innards of a fish to ward away the demon Asmodeus. According to Tob 6:8, Raphael instructs Tobias to burn a fish's heart and liver in front of a person afflicted by an evil spirit

16 Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 92 describes the root as a parallel to Tobias' fish in the book of Tobit, in that it has a "built in" power.

17 See B. Mandelbaum, *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana According to an Oxford Manuscript with Variants from all Known Manuscripts and Genizoth Fragments and Parallel Passages with Commentary and Introduction*, 2 vol.; 1st ed. (New York, 1962), 74 and parallels.

18 The medicinal purposes of fish have been examined elsewhere and the use of a fish's gall for healing eye conditions is known throughout the ancient world. For Assyrian and Babylonian examples, see W. von Soden, "Fischgalle als Heil-Mittel für die Augen," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 21 (1996): 81–83. For classical examples, see B. Kollman, "Göttliche Offenbarung magisch-pharmakologischer Heilskunst im Buch Tobit," *ZAW* 106 (1994): 294–97 and I. Papayannopoulos, J. Laskaratos, and S. Marketos, "Remarks on Tobit's Blindness," *Koroth* 9 (1985): 181–87.

or demon. The use of smoke suggests that a kind of fumigation is in mind that is meant to coax the spirit to leave. The instruction also states that by doing this the demon will “flee away and never remain with that person any longer.” This long-term effect is best understood as apotropaic. For our purposes, however, we are interested in the use of the fish’s heart and liver, as well as the use of smoke. Tobias is described as having put the fish’s parts in the θυμιάματος (“incense burner”),¹⁹ probably originally used for the wedding feast or for fumigating the bride’s dress.²⁰

The use of fish may have had apotropaic qualities based simply on the smell.²¹ Depending on the state of the fish (fresh, rotten) or the species, the odour it emitted could have had a sympathetic magical effect. Just as a foul odour repels human beings, so too it may have been thought to work for evil spirits. As Bohak notes: “it is the *smell* which drives the demon away, and no further actions – neither verbal nor written incantations, nor any additional implements or rituals – are needed to perform this task.”²² Additionally, the size of the fish may have contributed to its apotropaic potency. The fish is described in Tob 6:3 as a “large fish” (ἰχθὺς μέγας) that was able to “swallow” (καταπιεῖν) Tobias’ foot. The species of fish has been variously speculated: 1) large pike or shad;²³ 2) crocodile/hippopotamus;²⁴ 3) “Tigris Salmon” (*Barbus esocinus*).²⁵ These fish range anywhere from a couple feet to two metres in length. With such a large fish, the amount of smoke produced (or simply the size itself) may have aided in amplifying the apotropaic power (if not lengthening the time of its efficaciousness).

Moreover, Tobias may have protected himself by actually consuming the fish. Tob 6:6 states that after catching the fish, Tobias roasts and eats some of it. Notably, Raphael does not eat the fish (cf. Tob 12:19). The reason for this is not given,

19 See BDAG, s.v., “θυμιάμα.”

20 Robert J. Littman, *Tobit: The Book of Tobit in Codex Sinaiticus* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 124; Deborah A. Green, *Soothing Odors: The Transformation of Scent in Ancient Israelite and Ancient Jewish Literature* (PhD diss., Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003); Kjeld Nielsen, *Incense in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1986); Carol Meyer, “Fumes, Flames or Fluids? Reframing the Cup-and-Bowl Question” in *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World: A Tribute to Cyrus H. Gordon*, eds. Meir Lubetski, Clare Gottlieb, and Sharon Keller (JSOTSup 273; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 30–39.

21 In mocking a Jewish exorcist, Lucian of Samosata said that “many demons were expelled by the bad-breathed exorcist. Not by his adjurations, but by the smell of shit!” (*AP* 11.427). While such a statement is obviously not meant to reflect actual exorcistic practice, this passing reference to foul odours repelling demons is at least worth considering as an accidental reference to a known mechanism.

22 Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 90. Bohak views the ritual as exorcistic. Curiously, however, he likens the ritual to “those little electric ‘fumigators’ which are used today to drive mosquitoes away by slowly burning a chemical substance whose effects they would rather avoid.” Such an analogy, however, seems to be more apotropaic than exorcistic in nature.

23 Otto F. Fritzsche, *Die Bücher Tobia und Judith erklärt* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1853), 52.

24 See Moore, Carey A. 1996. *Tobit A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 199.

25 Robert J. Littman, *The Book of Tobit in Codex Sinaiticus* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 108.

though it is possibly twofold. Firstly, Raphael has taken on a human form named Azariah. Sometimes, angels refuse to accept meals from humans (Judg 13:16), while other times they seem to be okay doing this (Gen 18:8). Secondly, not eating a fish may be for the same logic found in the *Greek Magical Papyri* surveyed below. Fish are harmful for spirits. Thus, Raphael refuses to partake in eating the fish, lest his clever guise is found out. In Tobias' case, however, consuming the fish may have helped protect him when entering the bridal chamber, although this is never stated.²⁶ Which part of the fish Tobias eats is also unclear. The text states that he “gathered together (συνήγαγεν/ λαβὼν) the gall, heart, and liver” and “roasted and ate some of the fish (καὶ ὥπτησεν τοῦ ἰχθύος καὶ ἔφαγεν), and kept some to be salted (ἀφῆκεν ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἡλισμένον).” Presumably, the parts he ate were not the insides that he gathered together for separate use. Eating any part of the fish, however, still may have had residual apotropaic power.

Thus, the use of a fish in warding away evil spirits in Tobit was perhaps based on multiple factors. The fish itself has a “built in” apotropaic power. If Tobit was penned in an Egyptian context, the taboo nature of fish in that culture may have contributed to the origins of the purported efficaciousness of this object.²⁷ Such food laws certainly influenced the later *Greek Magical Papyri* to which we now turn.

Fish in Greco-Roman Magic

The *Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM) and *Demotic Magical Papyri* (PDM) are a collection of magical texts from Egypt. The spells range quite considerably in their dating: “the extant texts are mainly from the second century B.C. to the fifth century A.D.”²⁸ Importantly, the PGM seem to borrow from early Jewish and Christian forms of magic and exorcism. Jewish titles for God, for example, such as Iao, Sabaoth, Adonai, and Eloie appear quite regularly throughout the spells (e.g., PGM IV. 1577; V. 481; VII. 400; XXXVI. 42; XLIII. 13).²⁹ In another instance, Jesus himself is used as a source of power for driving out daimons:

26 “He ate” (ἔφαγεν); G1 has the plural, as does one Vulgate manuscript. 4Q197 4 I, 10 contains the singular ככל.

27 On the forbidden nature of fish in Egypt, see William Jefferson Darby, *Food: The Gift of Osiris* (2 vols.; London: Academic Press, 1977), 1:380–404; Several uses of fish oil for apotropaic purposes can also be found in Mesopotamian texts. For example, the following prescription states: “If ditto (a person continually sees dead persons in his dreams), ‘hum[an] semen’, fish oil, (and) naphtha you repeatedly rub on [him . . .].” For texts and translations, see JoAnn Scurlock, *Magico-Medical Means of Treating Ghost-Induces Illnesses in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Leiden/Boston: Brill/Styx, 2006), 254, 401, 614, and also 67. On the unclean nature of pork, see H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1952), 690–91; J. Bergman, “Isis auf der Sau,” *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis* 6 (1974): 81–109; Darby, *The Gift of Osiris*, 1:171–209.

28 Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri* (Chicago: University Press, 1986), xlii. Translations of the PGM and PDM in this paper are from Betz.

29 PGM, XIII contains the remains of a text referred to as the “Eighth Book of Moses,” which includes other works such as the “Key of Moses” (XIII, 21) and “The sacred secret book of Moses

Excellent rite for driving out daimons: *Formula* to be spoken over his head: Place olive branches before him, and stand behind him and say: “Hail, God of Abraham; hail, God of Isaac; hail, God of Jacob; Jesus Chrestos, the Holy Spirit, the Son of the Father, who is above the Seven, who is within the Seven. Bring Iao Sabaoth; may your power issue forth from him, NN, - until you drive away this unclean daimon Satan, who is in him (*PGM* IV. 1227–39).

Such an overlap in material reveals that there was overlap or exchanges of different ideas and techniques in antiquity, even of opposing religious systems.

In various spells from the *PGM*, spirits avoid or are predisposed to dislike fish.³⁰ This reluctance to engage with those who consume fish and the use of fish in certain rituals such as conjuration is rooted in Egyptian religion, namely its mythology and purity laws.³¹ According to Egyptian mythology, Osiris’ phallus was eaten by fish after his younger brother Seth threw his body into the river.³² Followers of Seth honored various fish at certain times and locations in Egyptian history,

called the eighth or holy” (XIII, 343f). Additionally, a magical text known as the “Prayer of Jacob” (*PGM*, XXIIb) also appears in this work with more Jewish elements than pagan. See also Bruce Chilton, “God as ‘Father’ in the Targumim, in Non-Canonical Literatures of Early Judaism and Primitive Christianity and in Matthew” in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation*, eds. James H. Charlesworth and Craig A. Evans (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 151–69; Martin Rist, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: A Liturgical and Magical Formula.” *JBL* 57.3 (September 1938): 289–303.

30 That fish were a regular ingredient in magical formulae is evident from Apuleius’ rhetorical question (158/9 CE): “Are these your proofs of my magic—the fall of a boy, the marriage of a woman, and shopping for fish?” (*Apology* 2, 46). Nicole B. Hansen, “Ancient Execration Magic in Coptic and Islamic Egypt” in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, eds. R. Van Den Broek, H.J.W. Drijvers, and H.S. Versnel (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 141; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 435: “Another animal that often was involved in the execration ritual was the fish. In one ancient text, figurines were said to be placed in fish skin. In another case, the name of the victim was inscribed, using a fish bone on the chest of a wax figure representing him. In a text from Esna Temple, the victims were identified with the fish.”

31 Hippocrates, *On the Sacred Disease* 1.10–46, notes: “I think that the first people to have projected this disease [epilepsy] as “sacred” were men like those who are now mages [magoi] and purifiers [kathartai] and beggar-priests [agurtai] and vagrant-charlatans [alazones]. . . They added further appropriate arguments to render their method of healing safe for themselves. They applied purifications [katharmoi] and incantations [epaoidai] and told people to refrain from bathing and many foods unsuitable for the sick to eat: among fish they banned red mullet, black-tail, grey mullet, and eel (for these are the most hazardous); among meats goat, venison, pork and dog (for these are the meats that upset the stomach most).”

32 “Of the parts of Osiris’s body, the only one which Isis did not find was the male member, for the reason that this had been at once tossed into the river, and the lepidotus, the sea-bream, and the pike had fed upon it; and it is from these very fishes the Egyptians are most scrupulous in abstaining. But Isis made a replica of the member to take its place, and consecrated the phallus, in honour of which the Egyptians even at the present day celebrate a festival” (Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, 358B). Despite this connection, Youri Volokhine, ““Food Prohibitions” in Pharaonic Egypt. Discourses and Practices” in *Food Taboos and Biblical Prohibitions: Reassessing Archaeological and Literary Perspectives*, eds. Peter Altmann, Anna Angelini, and Abra Spiciarich (Archaeology and Bible 2; Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 51 notes: “The idea that fish is suspect because it is linked to the devouring of Osiris’ member is Greek, and it is not clearly attested by Egyptian texts.”

which resulted in the avoidance or particular use of fish in various rituals.³³ Comparatively, followers of Osiris avoided fish because of this conflict with Seth, yet could also be used in threats against Osiris to have the god follow the ritualists commands. This general mythos seems to have influenced the practical belief on the limitations of what conjured spirit assistants could accomplish for the spell-caster. *PGM* I. 96–105, for example, reads as follows:

This is the sacred rite for acquiring an assistant. It is acknowledged that he is a god; he is an aerial spirit, which you have seen. If you give him a command, straightway he performs the task: he sends dreams, he brings women, men without the use of magical material, he kills, he destroys, he stirs up winds from the earth, he carries gold, silver, bronze, and he gives them to you whenever the need arises. And he frees from bonds a person chained in prison, he opens doors, he causes invisibility so that no one can see you at all, he is a bringer of fire, he brings water, wine, bread, and [whatever] you wish in the way of foods: olive oil, vinegar – with the single exception of fish.

The conjured spirit assistant, referred to as a *πάρεδρος*, was commonly understood to be the spiritual manifestation of a celestial body, a god/goddess, or the spirit of a dead human.³⁴ Through a series of ritual actions, the spell-caster would summon the *πάρεδρος* to aid them in further magical ventures such as divination or other practical feats. The *πάρεδρος* in this spell will complete a number of tasks (including stopping “very many evil [daimons]; *PGM* I. 116), with the exception of bringing their master fish or pork (*PGM* I. 105–106). Since the spirits were sometimes unpredictable, ritualists required protective measures to ensure their obedience. In an Apollonian invocation (*PGM* I. 262–347) used to summon gods and “chthonic daimons,” for example, the spell-caster is reminded not to lose a leaf inscribed with various magical symbols because it is meant to protect them from daimons, likely including the one they are summoning.³⁵ As Ciruolo notes: “knowledge of the name of the *πάρεδρος* enables the practitioner to summon and *control* him.”³⁶ Yet, despite the use of protective counter-measures and the binding of the spirit

33 Darby, *The Gift of Osiris*, 1:383: “Interpretation of these contradictions may be attempted within one or more frameworks: the Osiris-Seth conflict; the deification of fish not associated with the Osirian epic; class differences; and imposition of dietary restrictions by foreign conquerors.”

34 See Leda Jean Ciruolo, “Supernatural Assistants in the Greek Magical Papyri” in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, eds. Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 279–95. Volokhine, ““Food Prohibitions,”” 50, states: “If scenes depicting fishing and the preparation of fish are well attested, it is also clear that, for some periods – especially the Old Kingdom – and certain contexts, one can observe an absence of fish in representations of offerings: sometimes gods, kings, and the dead do not touch them.” See also LSJ, s.v., “*πάρεδρος*.”

35 One early 19th–18th century BCE statuette shows a girl wearing a fish amulet. See Geraldine Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1994), 107.

36 Ciruolo, “Supernatural Assistants,” 281 (emphasis mine).

assistant to complete the tasks assigned to it, the *πάρεδρος* in *PGM* I. 96–105 will not transport fish to the summoner. That the *πάρεδρος* will not complete this task is best explained by the Egyptian mythological context of the spell itself. Yet, it is unclear whether the spirit will not bring fish for purely ceremonial reasons (i.e., because fish are considered ritually unclean)³⁷ or because the *πάρεδρος* actually fears fish due to what happened to Osiris' body.³⁸

In addition to not retrieving fish for the spell-caster, conjured spirit assistants may also refuse to comply to commands if they are predisposed to dislike the summoner for various reasons. Thus, *PGM* I. 278–92 reads as follows:

Now this is the rite: Take a lamp which has not been colored red and fit it with a piece of linen cloth and rose oil or oil or spikenard, and dress yourself in a prophetic garment and hold an ebony staff in your left hand and the protective charm in your right (i.e., the sprig of laurel). But keep in readiness a wolf's head so that you can set the lamp upon the head of the wolf, and construct an altar of unburnt clay near the head and the lamp so that you may sacrifice on it to the god. And immediately the divine spirit enters. The burnt offering in a wolf's eye, storax gum, cassia, balsam gum and whatever is valued among the spices, and pour a libation of wine and honey and iLuke and rain-water, [and make] 7 flat cakes and 7 round cakes. These you are going to make completely [near] the lamp, robed and refraining from all unclean things and from all eating of fish and from all sexual intercourse, so that you may bring the god into the greatest desire toward you.

The ritualist who is performing a burnt offering in order to summon a god must cease from eating fish so that they may “bring the god into the greatest desire toward you” (*PGM* I. 291).³⁹ Of the things the ritualist should avoid, fish is

37 *PGM* I, 42–43 refers to this spell as being from a certain Pnouthios to Ketyx. Ketyx has been interpreted as referring to a priestly figure. See W Quandt, “Ketyx,” *PRE* 21 (1921): 348–49.

38 This spell does not seem to represent a particular Sethian curse. Based on the available evidence, only the Oxyrhynchus fish can be properly identified as religiously abhorrent to followers of Seth. Thus, Darby, *The Gift of Osiris*, 1:389: “The speculation that the Egyptian tombs which portrayed the Oxyrhynchus belonged to followers of Seth, or that they were only of local significance, may be discarded purely on the basis of the widespread geographic and chronologic depiction of the Oxyrhynchus. All of these tombs could not belong to worshippers of Seth.”

39 “As for sea-fish, all Egyptians do not abstain from all of them, but from some kinds only; as, for example, the inhabitants of Oxyrhynchus abstain from those that are caught with a hook; for, inasmuch as they revere the fish called oxyrhynchus (the pike), they are afraid that the hook may be unclean. . . The priests, however, abstain from all fish; and on the ninth day of the first month, when every one of the other Egyptians eats a broiled fish in front of the outer door of his house, the priests do not even taste the fish, but burn them up in front of their doors. For this practice they have two reasons, one of which is religious and curious, and I shall discuss it at another time, since it harmonizes with the sacred studies touching Osiris and Typhon; the other is obvious and

separated as unique from “all unclean things” and sexual intercourse, suggesting that fish was especially dangerous or displeasing to the spirit. Upon completing the previous forms of the ritual, the spell-caster is told to recite a chant to adjure the god to heed his request. Notably, the summoner is to chant “. . . send him gentle, gracious, pondering no thoughts opposed to me” (*PGM* I. 321–22). Additionally, the spell-caster requests that the god not be “angry at my sacred chants” (*PGM* I. 322–23) and petitions for protection: “guard that my whole body come to light intact” (*PGM* I. 323–24). These protective measures are in place because if the conjured spirit does not approve of the ritualist, they may lash out against them. Thus, eating fish may have either angered the spirit or, more likely, dissuaded it from engaging the spell-caster at all.

Fish are also used as part of a threat against Osiris as insurance that he will dispense revelatory knowledge to the ritualist: “. . . Come to me, you under the earth, arouse [yourself] for me, great daimon, he of Noun, the subterranean. . . Unless I know what is in the minds of everyone. . . Your belly is eaten by fish, and I will not stop the fish chewing your body with their mouths, nor will the fish shut their mouths” (*PGM* V. 249–81). *PGM* V. 213–303 describes how to make and use a ritual scarab for divination. The spell-caster takes on the persona of the Egyptian god Thoth and adjures Osiris to arise from the underworld to answer his questions. The summoner threatens Osiris by suggesting that if he does not obey the ritualist the rest of his body will be destroyed, not simply his phallus.

Another example of the apotropaic use of fish can be found in *PGM* XII. 365–70:

Charm for causing separation: On a pot for smoke fish inscribe a spell with a bronze stylus and recite it afterward and put it where they [i.e., your victims] are, where they usually return, repeating at the same time this spell: “I call upon you, god, you who are in the empty air, you who are terrible, invisible, and great, you who afflict the earth and shake the universe, you who love disturbances and hate stability and scatter the clouds from one another. . .

This ritual, which involves engraving a spell to summon a god to torment a victim, is to be performed over a “pot for smoked fish” (ταρίχου ὄστρακον).⁴⁰ Since a fish

commonplace, in that it declares that fish is an unnecessary and superfluous food. . .” (Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, 358B). According to one Egyptian stèle of king Piye/Piankhi: “They could not enter the palace because they were not circumcised and eat fish. King Nimlot, however, entered the palace because he was a clean one and did not eat fish. They stood (there) and (but) one entered the palace: (lines 150–53 = Urk. I, 50/16–51/1) See N.-C. Grimal, *La stèle triomphale de Pi(‘ankh) y au Musée du Caire*, *JE* 48862 et 47086–47089 (PIFAO; Cairo, 1981).

40 Jacco Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites: The London-Leiden Magical Manuscripts and Translation in Egyptian Ritual (100–300 CE)* (Religions in the Greco-Roman World 153; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 136, suggests translating this phrase as “potsherd (of a vessel) for smoked fish”.

is not actually being smoked during the ritual, the idea seems to be an extra layer of protection so that the spirit does not turn around and afflict the ritualist. The remnants of the fish in the pot or on the potsherd (and possibly the smell) would have made the spirit aware of the possibility of fumigation. Once again, the spell-caster is calling upon the Osiris myth: “give to him. . . enmity, just as Typhon [= Seth] and Osiris had” (*PGM* XII. 373–74). Yet, the god that is summoned in this spell is not Osiris himself. Since the gods of the Egyptian pantheon and lesser spirit beings were apparently expected to know about such mythology, it is appropriate for the spell-caster to use the Seth-Osiris conflict as a magical trope in the ritual. Thus, fish once again are used as an apotropaic measure against possibly hostile spirits.

In addition to the *PGM*, we also have two examples in the *PDM* that point towards an apotropaic use of fish. The first can be found in *PDM* XIV. 335–55:

[A spell for making] a woman love a man You should grind these [ingredients]. You should put them into a clean [vessel]; you should put the oil on top of them one day before the beginning of the lunar month. When the lunar month occurs, you should bring a black Nile fish measuring nine fingers . . . its eye(s) being variegated(?) in color You should take it [to your] house; you should bring the [fish] up out of the oil; you should tie it by its tail and strip of flax; you should hang it up [by the head on] the vine. . . You should put it in a hidden place or in [your house]. You should spend two more days, reciting to the oil again, making seven days. You should keep it. When you [wish] to make it do its work, you should anoint your phallus and your face and you should lie with the woman to whom you will do it.

The spell-caster is provided with an incantation to speak over the oil which consists of identifying himself as various deities and royal epithets. In addition to the use of fish in the ritual, the mention of the “lake of Wu-poke” deserves attention. Wu-poke is the precinct of Osiris at Abydos. *PDM* XIV. 170–75, for example, refers to this location as the place where the guardian for the “great corpse” of Osiris dwells. The deity being summoned is a goddess based on the feminine singular “you” found in *PDM* XIV. 351–52: “You are the first one, the great one, great of magic, the living uraeus.” The goddess is invoked to cause women to fall in love with the spell-caster, but it is unclear whether she does this by means of intermediary spirits or not.⁴¹ The use of fish and the mention of Wu-poke seems

Additionally: “A potsherd that had been in contact with fish could therefore serve as an appropriate writing medium for a Sethian curse formula” (136 n. 88).

41 A similar spell offered in *PDM* XIV. 355–65 has the goddess called upon as Sakhmet. The goddess is petitioned to send favor and love into the oil of the ritualist and then recite an invocation over a black Nile fish. Combined with this is to be used a “small amulet plant(?) of Isis”. Again, it is unclear whether the goddess herself will fulfill the magical component for the spell-caster or

to be invoked for the latter. Since the goddess resides in the waters where Osiris' phallus was eaten, she must be feared by other spirit beings. Their disobedience or noncompliance to the spell-caster's whims would therefore put them in danger of facing the goddess's wrath, perhaps a punishment similar to Osiris. Thus, the use of fish in this ritual seems to be an apotropaic threat against the summoned spirit.

The final example of fish being used for apotropaic purposes is found in *PDM* XIV. 875–85. In this ritual, a youth is brought to a high place and has his eyelids painted with a magical ointment so that, when his eyes open, he will see the gods and be able to speak with them. The ointment given is described as follows:

[The ointment] which you put in the youth's eyes when he goes to any vessel inquiry of the sun: you bring two *buri* fish of the river, both being alive; you burn one of them with vinewood before the sun; you add the blood of the other to it . . . you should spread (?) [it] in his eyes. . . . If you fill your eyes with this drug and look at the sun when it fills the sound-eye, your eyes being open toward it, he reveals himself to you and tells you an answer to everything. Its chief factor is purity. It is more profitable than the youth; it is profitable for you yourself as a person [acting] alone.

Notably, the use of the ointment is given. Its main function is for purity. The specific use of *buri* fish may mean that it was not considered ritually impure to consume or come in contact with. At the same time, the use of fish might have been used in the ritual with the pretense that when the youth or spell-caster opens their eyes and sees the summoned god, it would have prophylactic elements necessary for the encounter to go smoothly.⁴²

In the six spells from the *PGM* and *PDM* analyzed above, fish were viewed as having apotropaic power. Such a belief is best understood within the context of ritual purity laws and the Egyptian mythology situated around the god Osiris. Fish were used to pre-emptively nullify antagonistic spiritual encounters and avoided to bring favor to the spell-caster during a summoning. Such views of fish likely influenced the author of the book of Tobit in using fish to ward away the evil spirit Asmodeus.

Spirits of the Dead in Jewish and Greco-Roman Thought

In order to understand Luke's specific post-resurrection narrative choices, it is important now to briefly turn to what ideas of the dead returning were common

another spiritual assistant sent by her. In a prayer offered to Ptah, Sakhmet, Ptah-Sokar, and Osiris, they are petitioned as follows: "May you listen to me praying every day like the transfigured spirits whom you made so glorious."

42 See n. 28.

during the first century CE. Below I have highlighted the most salient features to consider.

The New Testament authors primarily relied on an “Enochic” etiology for the origins of evil spirits. Jewish legends from the Second Temple period commonly explain that, prior to the flood account of the book of Genesis, angelic spirits (called “Watchers”) came to Earth and had sexual relations with human women. As a result of these sexual unions, the women gave birth to giants, who subsequently turned to destroy human beings. God punished the Watchers by binding them in a subterranean prison and causing the giants to kill one another. Upon the death of the giants, however, evil spirits sprang forth from their bodies (1 En. 15:8).⁴³ Thus, demons, or the “bastard spirits” according to a number of texts from Qumran (e.g., 4Q510 1 4–6), were disembodied spirits that once had physical bodies. Their transient existence was a punishment for crossing the borders between the divine and human realms. Thus, their desire to inhabit human bodies makes sense. Yet, such a complicated mythos does not tell us about Jewish beliefs of the normative human dead returning as spectral beings.

The Enochic etiology of evil spirits was not necessarily ubiquitous among Jews during this time and it is likely that overlapping and seemingly contradictory beliefs existed among Jews of the Second Temple Period.⁴⁴ Josephus, for example, in speaking about the properties of the *Baaras* root says: “With all these attendant risks, it possesses one virtue for which it is prized; for the so-called demons – that is, the spirits of wicked men which enter the living and kill them unless aid is forthcoming – are promptly expelled by this root, if merely applied to the patients” (*J.W.* 7.180–85). Josephus’ statement here to the “spirits of wicked men” may be an example of him attending to his Greek audience.⁴⁵ Yet, such a conflation of ideas is not uncommon to Jewish thinkers of the first century CE. Philo too parallels demons with the spirits of the dead in his work *On the Embassy to Gaius* (65).⁴⁶ Such a belief may be rooted within the Hebrew Bible itself. The

43 Jub. 10:5 and other works such as the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* (e.g., T. Reu. 5:6) along with various works at Qumran (e.g., 4Q510 1 5; 1QapGen II, 1; CD II, 18) attest to a common belief that the Watchers were the fathers of the evil spirits.

44 Gideon Bohak in his contribution to “Demons, Demonology” in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception: Dabbesheth – Dreams and Dream Interpretation*, eds. Hans-Josef Klauck, Volker Leppin, Bernard McGinn, Choon-Leong Seow, Hermann Spieckermann, Barry Dov Walfish, and Eric J. Ziolkowski, Vol. 6 (De Gruyter, 2012), 548 states, however: “These widely-divergent accounts of the demons’ ultimate origins should not be seen as conflicting or contradictory, since it is quite clear that ancient Jews believed in many different types of demons, and therefore saw nothing wrong with the proliferation of different etiologies.”

45 Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 92 n. 62.

46 On this point see Giovanni B. Bazzana, *Having the Spirit of Christ: Spirit Possession and Exorcism in the Early Christ Groups* (London: Yale University Press, 2020), 79. In his work *On the Giants*, Philo states: “So if you realize that souls and demons and angels are but different names for the same one underlying object, you will cast from you that most grievous burden, the fear of demons or superstition” (4.16).

necromancer in 1 Sam 28 was able to raise the spirit (אֶלֹהִים)⁴⁷ of Samuel and it was likely taken for granted that some nebulous remains of the dead existed and could be communicated with.⁴⁸ Several midrashim record a common belief that the soul of the dead hovered above the corpse for a period of three (*Genesis Rabbah* 100:7; *Leviticus Rabbah* 18:1) or seven days (*Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, 34). Such beliefs are late and we should be cautious of reading these mentions of spirits back into first century Palestine. Nonetheless, based on the testimonies of Josephus, Philo, and the Hebrew Bible, folkloric beliefs about the dead returning as spirits was not foreign to Luke or his audience.

Greek texts give a wider array of stories and references to the spirits of the dead.⁴⁹ In general, they appear as recognizable remnants of their former selves (Homer, *Il.* 23.103–104; *Od.* 11.204–23), sometimes even with the physical indicators of how they died (Vergil, *Aen.* 1.355; Apuleius, *Mei.* 8.8). Additionally, they are able to teleport (Lucian, *Philops.* 27; Pliny 7.25.10; Phlegon, *Book of Marvels* 2.10), similar to Jesus's sudden appearances and disappearances. Sarah Iles Johnston has argued that there are three partially overlapping groups of spirits of dead humans in Greek literature: 1) ἄωροι (the “untimely” dead),⁵⁰ 2) ἀταφοί (the “unburied” dead),⁵¹ and 3) βίαιοθάνατοι (the “violent” dead).⁵² These spirits were sometimes called upon in magical spells or curses. Spell-casters made use of such spirits because, as Johnston points out: “the practitioner knew that uninitiated souls would be easier to manipulate because, like these others, they were shut out of the best-protected parts of the Underworld.”⁵³ When not used for magic, however, the spirits themselves could cause havoc on the living. In Homeric and Classical Greek literature, the βίαιοθάνατοι avenge their death by indirect means such as agents. This was usually portrayed as an internal, psychological, attack. Later Greek literature portrays the βίαιοθάνατοι as becoming self-engaged with their vengeance and the attacks are more physical in nature. This progression

47 Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* (NAC 7; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 268: “In the present instance it seems reasonable to conclude that the medium’s words reflected a pagan belief that Samuel had become a “god”—a spirit-being possessing capabilities beyond those of mortals—following his death. The writer, wishing to demonstrate linguistically that she was speaking heretically, employed a plural verb form with the subject ‘ēlōhīm.”

48 Some later rabbinic texts also hold to the belief that the spirits of the dead can linger in the world. Thus, *b. Berakhot* 17b–18b records an instance in which a man slept in a graveyard and overheard two spirits talking to each other about their plans to float about the earth. Similarly, *b. Nidah* 17a condemns people who sleep in graveyards “In order that an impure spirit rest upon him – at times it might endanger him.” Such a condemnation in the gemara may reflect some kind of necromancy. S. Lowy, “The Motivation of Fasting in Talmudic Literature,” *JJS* 9 (1958): 33–34; See also Aryeh Cohen, ““Do the Dead Know?” The Representation of Death in the Bavli” *AJS Review* 24.1 (1999): 67 n. 39.

49 For more examples and categories of the dead, see Price, “The ‘Ghost’ of Jesus,” 290–95.

50 LSJ, s.v., “ἄωρος.”

51 LSJ, s.v., “ἄταφος.”

52 LSJ, s.v., “βίαιοθάνατος.”

53 Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 107.

from passive to active agent likely stems from the development of dualistic thoughts about body and soul within Hellenism.⁵⁴ While the *αταφοί* could be appeased by conducting proper funerary rites, the apotropaic measures used against *ἄωροι* and *βιαιοθάνατοι* were varied. Of note, the use of food sacrifices and libations to appease the violent dead are known.⁵⁵

The Narrative Function of Fish in Luke 24:36–43

The necessary elements to produce Luke's rationale for including the post-resurrection details he did can now be considered. Recognizing the patterns in Greco-Roman and Jewish thought, we now turn to the account in Luke 24. When Jesus appears before the disciples, their terror is not rooted in the sudden appearance itself, but because they thought he was a spirit (*πνεῦμα*). Codex Bezae's variant of "ghost" (*φάντασμα*) is best explained as an interpretation of the general word *πνεῦμα* and is quite appropriate. In Judaism during this time, dualistic Greek thought about the body and soul had already permeated Jewish thinking (e.g., Jub. 23:1; 1 En. 22; 4 Ezra 7:76–101; b. Ber. 18b).⁵⁶ The nature of Jesus's body was such that, while recognizable, was still different enough to inspire fear. Such a view of the resurrected body is found also in the writings of Paul (1 Cor 15:12–54). Yet, their fear also may tie into the popular conception of the Greek *βιαιοθάνατοι*. The disciples' terror is thus not borne out of Jesus simply being a phantasm, but a vengeful ghost that had died a violent death. Their abandonment of their leader may have prompted them to fear retribution for their betrayal as was typical of such hostile spirits. Luke's audience may well have been aware of such categories of spirits.

Critical biblical scholarship has often pointed to unique non-Lukan vocabulary and style in this pericope as evidence that Luke was dependant on an earlier tradition.⁵⁷ Additionally, there are parallel accounts found in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–18). Strikingly, the Gospel of John (20:19–23) shares a number of word-for-word phrases and other similarities with Luke's account. Thus, as Bovon states: "Luke and John share here not only common

54 Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 144, 147.

55 Johnston, *Restless Dead*, 47: "we occasionally find references to the use of libations and food to appease the dead in off-hand remarks such as that of Plutarch, who describes the libations that Apollo made after killing Python as being the same as those that people offer to soften the anger of 'daimones whom they call *alastores* and *palamnaioi*' - that is, the dead who seek vengeance for their violent deaths or the supernatural agents who act on behalf of those dead."

56 In Acts 12:14–15, for example, after Peter escapes from prison, he is perceived by Rhoda to be his "angel" (*Ὁ ἄγγελός ἐστιν αὐτοῦ*). Those who hear Rhoda's initial pronouncement that Peter is at the door accuse of her of being "out of your mind" (*Μαίνῃ*; Acts 12:15). It may be, as Keener, suggests, that Rhoda or those criticizing her perceive her to be having an ecstatic trance-state. Jesus himself had claimed that those who rise from the dead are like the angels (Luke 20:36), sharing similar sentiments to other Jewish thinkers in the Second Temple Period (e.g., 1 En. 104:4).

57 Bovon, *Luke 3*, 386–387.

memories but also a strong tradition. Of course, they make use of it freely, but they do so with the same respect.”⁵⁸ These parallels, however, contain dramatic changes of location among other factors, one of which is that Luke is the only author to include the use of eating fish as evidence for Jesus’s physical resurrection.

From a surface reading of Luke 24:36–43 Jesus’s request to eat something seems to serve the basic purpose of showing he is not a disembodied spirit.⁵⁹ Yet, divine beings were not incapable of consuming physical food (Gen 18:6–8; Ps 78:25; Homer, *Il.* 5:341). Luke’s interest in the supernatural extends beyond simply recording miracles, but informs the structure and particular elements within his narrative. Graham Twelftree, for example, has argued that, unlike Mark, who begins Jesus’s ministry with powerful displays of exorcism that eventually dwindle in importance, Luke structures his narrative in such a way so that exorcism is seen as an ongoing and important work of Jesus in and through the early Church.⁶⁰ Additionally, throughout Luke-Acts we see a number of apparent familiarities with Jewish and Greco-Roman magic.⁶¹ Acts 5:15 and 19:12, for example, describe the miraculous expectations and uses of shadows (σκιᾶ),⁶² handkerchiefs (σουδάρια),⁶³ and aprons (σικκίνθια).⁶⁴ Moreover, Luke’s use of the phrase “finger of God” *contra* Matthew’s “spirit of God” is meant to mirror the miraculous ministry of Moses and Aaron in Exod 8:19 (cf. Exod 31:18; Deut 9:10; Ps 8:4), a ministry contrasted with Egyptian magic, but also reliant on various *materia magica* nonetheless.⁶⁵ Finally, Luke broadens the scope of demonic activity compared to the other Gospels. Twelftree, for example, notes that Luke “has blurred the distinction between demon possession and other kinds of sickness so that in effect all sickness (and healing) is given a demonic and cosmic dimension . . . all healing is defeat of the demonic.”⁶⁶ Thus, I suggest that the “broiled fish” (Luke 24:42) introduced in Luke’s account of this appearance is best understood as part

58 Bovon, *Luke* 3, 388.

59 cf. Tob 12:19; Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.11.2, Philo, *On Abraham* 118.

60 Graham Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 132.

61 See Susan R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke’s Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989); Florent Heintz, *Trois Études Préliminaires: Actes 13:6–12; 16:16–19; 19:11–20. Pour Servir À L’élucidation Des Rapports Entre Pratiques Magiques et Monde Démoniaque Dans Le Christianisme Primitif, Mémoire de Spécialisation Inédit* (Geneva: Faculté autonome de théologie protestante, 1991).

62 BDAG, s.v., “σκιᾶ.” See P. W. Van der Horst, “Peter’s Shadow: The Religio-Historical Background of Acts v. 15,” *NTS* 23 (2, 1977): 204–12.

63 BDAG, s.v., “σουδάριον.”

64 BDAG, s.v., “σικκίνθιον.” See Craig Keener, *Acts* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: University Press, 2020), 473.

65 E.g., Aaron’s Staff (e.g., Exod 7:8), dust (Exod 8:16), and soot (Exod 9:8).

66 Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 154.

of a deliberate narrative choice based on Jewish and Greco-Roman magical views of fish.

Matthew's and Mark's accounts show great reluctance by the disciples to believe it is truly the resurrected Jesus standing before them. Matthew simply says that some of the disciples doubted (28:17). In the long ending of Mark, however, Jesus "rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen" (16:14). This hostile episode regarding the disciples' lack of faith is not foreign to Mark (c.f. 4:40; 6:52; 8:17; 10:5) and it should not be surprising that the other three Gospels soften Jesus's appearance to the eleven. It is interesting, however, that Jerome adds the following conversation between Jesus and the disciples at this point in Mark: "And [the disciples] made excuse, saying: 'This age of iniquity and unbelief is under Satan who, through unclean spirits, does not permit the true power of God to be apprehended. Therefore, reveal your righteousness, now'" (*Against Pelagius* 2.15). Regardless of the dating of the traditions from which the long ending of Mark and Jerome are dependent, it is worth considering how Jesus's response of eating fish in Luke affects the reading of this pericope.

While Jesus's consumption of food certainly aided in anti-docetic apologetics, one of its functions was, in addition to proving he was not simply physical (in fact, he had a different *glorified* body), that he was not an *evil* πνεῦμα or φάντασμα. It is worth noting that in Acts, when Paul is confronted by the Pharisees and Sadducees, they debate amongst themselves about the origins of Paul's message: "What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" (Acts 23:9).⁶⁷ Whether the πνεῦμα mentioned in Acts 23 ought to be identified as an evil spirit in their speculation is unclear, though it does open the possibility that such questions may have been circulating. The particular use of fish in the Lukan retelling of this story may have aided readers or opponents to the faith who argued that the risen Jesus was perhaps just a deceptive spirit or daimon. Since fish (especially burned fish) were used within the story of Tobit and Greco-Roman magic to repel evil, Luke's addition of this element in the story is appropriate.

It is notable that it is Jesus who asks for the fish. The disciples are not using the fish as a test against Jesus. Rather, Jesus is presenting it as further evidence that he is not a spirit, and certainly not one that means them any harm. This also reflects a concern of testing God in Luke-Acts (Luke 4:12; Acts 15:10; cf. Luke 10:25; 11:16; 22:28; 23:14; Acts 17:11). Of particular importance is the Beelzebub controversy. Scholars have long noted that the parallel between Matt 12:22–30, 43–45 and Luke 11:14–26 of this story are best explained as both depending

67 See Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary on the Book of Acts*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 574–75.

on Mark (3:22–30) and another common source (i.e., Q).⁶⁸ Whether Luke’s account is meant to be apologetic, missiologic, or Christological need not detain us.⁶⁹ It is clear that Jesus’s opponents wished to classify his miracles as magic.⁷⁰ They do not deny that the exorcism is effective, but rather it is the *source* of the power that is contested. One sector of the crowd sought to “test” Jesus by having him perform more miracles. Following this controversy, Jesus rebukes the crowd: “This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah” (Luke 11:29). This rebuke, I argue, influenced Luke’s retelling of the post-Easter appearances. Jesus’s anger at the crowds for their “magic-on-demand” approach to miracles is to point them towards the greater miracle of his resurrection. Jesus actually reverses this approach in his appearance to the eleven in Luke 24. Jesus’s appearance is not to be “tested,” but in itself is proof. Thus, Jesus’s eating of the fish proves his resurrected body to be legitimate, but it is of his own volition, not the whims of the crowds earlier in Luke.

Still, Luke’s inclusion of the use of fish for apotropaic protection serves as a subtle jab to the disciple’s superstition. Jesus condescends to this folkloric belief of warding away evil as a way of showing them that they are still not yet fully prepared to go out into the world and proclaim his message. This spiritual immaturity, however, would later be remedied by receiving the Holy Spirit: “But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

Conclusion

By studying the magical beliefs current around the time of Luke’s Gospel, it is possible to read the inclusion of Jesus eating fish in Luke 24:36–43 as a literary tactic used, not only for anti-docetic purposes, but for anti-demonic reasons. The main concern for Luke is that Jesus is not viewed as an evil or hostile spirit. Based on the study of Tobit, the magical papyri, and Luke’s writing interests and habits, I have argued that Luke likely knew of the apotropaic function of fish and used it purposefully in his narrative retelling of Christ’s post-Easter appearances.

68 For a brief bibliographic history of this dependence, see François Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. Donald S. Deer (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 115 n. 5.

69 Josef Ernst, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas: Übersetzt Und Erklärt* von Josef Ernst (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1977), 373.

70 Hence Celsus’ argument that “It was by magic that he was able to do the miracles” (*Contra Celsum* 1.6).