POWER OF PENTECOST: LUKE’S MISSIOLOGY IN ACTS 1—2

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I have been writing a commentary on Acts, a biblical book that provides more than enough insights by itself for this series on New Testament missiology. The line between writing a missiological commentary on Acts and developing Luke’s missiology in Acts would be rather thin; Acts is about mission. I am therefore focusing the discussion on the opening two chapters of Acts, which set the tone for the rest of the book by showing how God’s Spirit empowers crosscultural mission.¹ The beginning of Acts recapitulates the end of Lk 24,² hence functions as the pivot between Luke’s Gospel and Acts. It is thus a critical section for showing how the message of his Gospel will apply to the church. In this introductory section of Acts, Acts 1:8 is central: “You will be witnesses … to the ends of the earth once the

Spirit comes on you.” We will examine this verse in more detail in a few moments.

In this essay we will briefly survey the following points:

1. The Promise of Pentecost (1:4-8)
2. Preparation for Pentecost (prayer and leadership; 1:12-26)
3. The Proofs of Pentecost (2:1-4)
4. The Peoples of Pentecost (2:5-13)
5. The Prophecy of Pentecost (2:17-21)
6. The Preaching of Pentecost (2:22-40)
7. The Purpose of Pentecost (2:41-47)

Thus, I will try to survey some elements of various paragraphs in this opening section of Acts, though some of these paragraphs (especially the first one) will require much fuller comment for our purposes than others.

1. The Promise of Pentecost (1:4-8)

Jesus calls his disciples’ attention to a source of power that is so central that they must remain in Jerusalem, awaiting the Father’s promise, rather than attempting to fulfill the mission in their own strength (1:4). Luke here emphasizes that we cannot succeed in Christ’s mission without Christ’s power. Jesus already set the example for this dependence in Luke’s Gospel (as Acts will reiterate, 10:38). As introductions in ancient literature often traced the primary themes that a book would address, this introductory paragraph is one of the paragraphs in Acts’ opening section that we must explore in greater detail.

Jesus talks with his disciples about the “kingdom” (1:3) and the Spirit (1:4-5). Biblical prophets had already associated the outpouring

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4See e.g., Polybius 3.1.3—3.5.9, esp. 3.1.7; 11.1.4-5; Rhet. Alex. 29, 1436a.33-39; Dionysius of Halicarnassus Thuc. 19; Lysias 24; Cicero Or. Brut. 40.137; Virgil Aen. 1.1-6; Aulus Gellius pref. 25; Soranus Gynec. 1.intro.2; 1.1.3; 2.5.9 [25.78]; Philostratus Vit. Apoll. 7.1; 8.1.
of the Spirit with the end-time restoration of Israel (e.g., Is 44:3; 59:21; Ezek 36:26-27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28-29). The disciples, then, ask the obvious question: is Jesus about to restore the kingdom? (1:6).

Jesus answers that the consummation of the kingdom will eventually come (1:7), but the Spirit is given now so that the disciples can prepare for the kingdom’s coming by evangelizing the nations (1:8). Because the disciples expected the Spirit eschatologically, they would understand Jesus’ promise of the Spirit as involving the coming of the future. Once the disciples understood that the Spirit would precede the consummation of the kingdom, they should understand that the Spirit was giving them power to live out some of the life of the future kingdom in the present, an idea found in many first-century Christian texts (Rom 8:11, 23; 14:17; 1 Cor 2:9-10; 2 Cor 5:5; Gal 5:5; 6:8; Eph 1:13-14; 2 Thess 2:13; Heb 6:4-5).

In 1:8, Jesus promises that they will receive “power” when the Spirit comes. What does Luke mean by power? Although not all references involve healing and exorcism, these constitute the most common expressions of that power in Luke’s narrative. Thus Jesus casts out demons with power in Lk 4:36; power was present for healing


in Lk 5:17; power was coming from Jesus to heal in Lk 6:19; power came from Jesus to heal in Lk 8:46; and Jesus gave the Twelve power over demons in Lk 9:1. Likewise, in Acts 3:12, Peter insists that it is not by their own “power” or holiness that the man was healed, but by Jesus’ name. The authorities demand in Acts 4:7, “By what power, or in what name,” the man was healed, inviting the same emphasis. In Acts 6:8, Stephen, “full of grace and power,” was doing wonders and signs.7 In Acts 10:38, Peter declares that Jesus healed all who were oppressed by the devil because he was anointed with the Spirit and power. When John Wimber and others have spoken of “power evangelism,” they have echoed a frequent Lukan motif.8

We should note how closely Luke’s account connects this empowerment with the Spirit. The Hebrew Scriptures often associated the Spirit with prophetic empowerment, among other activities. By the era of the early church, early Jewish sources are apt to focus on this activity even more specifically, as a number of scholars, most extensively Robert Menzies, have shown.9 Because the Spirit was so

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7A dominant Greek term for “miracles” in the Gospels and Acts is literally “powers”; we should perhaps not read too much into the etymological connection, but Luke might at least play on it (cf. e.g., Lk 10:13; 19:37; Acts 2:22; 8:13; 19:11; see BDAG). Paul can also associate “power” with miracles in Paul (Rom 15:19), though he more often associates it with the “weak” miracle-working message itself (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:18, 24; 2:4-5; Phil 3:10; 1 Thess 1:5; cf. 2 Tim 1:8). On power’s association with the Spirit in Paul, see Gordon D. Fee, God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 35-36; Peter J. Gräbe, “Dunamis (in the Sense of Power) as a Pneumatological Concept in the Main Pauline Letters,” BZ 36 (2, 1992): 226-35.


closely associated with prophecy and the kinds of activities undertaken by prophets, Jesus was promising the disciples that the same Spirit who spoke through the prophets would speak through them. If we are too accustomed to that notion to catch its full force, we might imagine Jesus speaking to us and saying, “You will be like Isaiah,” or, “You will be like Jeremiah,” or, “You will be like Deborah.”

Because Luke has already noted that Jesus’ commission is grounded in Scripture (Lk 24:44-46), he invites us to hear echoes of Scripture in Jesus’ words here. The promise that the Spirit would empower them as “witnesses to … the ends of the earth” reflects the language of Isaiah. Isaiah spoke of Israel or its remnant being “witnesses” for YHWH (Is 43:10; 44:8), a role here applied to witnesses for Jesus. Isaiah spoke of God empowering his people through his Spirit in that time (e.g., Is 32:15; 44:3), including to speak for him (Is 42:1; 48:16; 59:21; 61:1). The “ends of the earth” also echoes Isaiah, especially Is 49:6, later quoted in Acts 13:47. In that

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11On Isaiah in Acts, including Acts 1:8, see especially and most usefully David W. Pao, Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

passage, it applies to Paul’s mission, indicating that this mission in Acts applies not only to the Twelve, but to Jesus’ movement of whom they were the most visible representatives and leaders. That is clear also because Luke is explicit that the empowerment of the Spirit necessary for the task is not only for the Twelve but also for all believers (2:38-39), whatever our various roles.

Ancient writers sometimes stated a thesis or offered a preview toward the beginning of their work, and scholars often observe that Acts 1:8 provides one very rough outline for Acts, which moves from Jerusalem (Acts 1—7) to Judea and Samaria (8; 9:31-43) and toward the ends of the earth (10—28). Whereas Luke’s Gospel begins and ends with the Temple in Jerusalem, Acts moves from Jerusalem to Rome. The overall narrative movement in Acts, then, is from heritage to mission.

Where does Luke envision the “ends of the earth”? His contemporaries in the Mediterranean world spoke of the far west as Spain or (beyond it) the “river” Ocean. To the east, they thought of such regions as Parthia, and beyond it, India and China. They knew


Cf. e.g., Thucydides 1.23.6; Pliny N.H. 8.1.1; 11.1.1; 34.1.1; 36.1.1; 37.1.1; Philostratus Vit. Apoll. 7.1; 8.1.


A central argument in my forthcoming Acts commentary, but often emphasized, though stated differently, especially as “from Jerusalem to Rome” (e.g., Homer A. Kent, Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in the Book of Acts [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972]).

For Spain, see e.g., Strabo 1.1.5, 8; 3.2; Seneca Nat. Q. 1.pref.13; Silius Italicus 1.270; 15.638; Pliny Ep. 2.3.8; Greek Anthology 4.3.84-85; for Oceanus, see e.g., Pliny N.H. 2.67.167; Philostratus Hrk. 8.13.

Contrasting Spain and India as opposite ends of the earth, see Strabo 1.1.8; Seneca Nat. Q. 1.pref.13; Juvenal Sat. 10.1-2.

China was well known, and the Roman empire had trade ties there; e.g., Pliny N.H. 12.1.2; 12.41.84; Lionel Casson, The Ancient Mariners: Seafarers and Sea Fighters of the Mediterranean in Ancient Times (2nd ed.; Princeton, NJ:
of peoples to the north such as Scythians, Germans, Britons, and a place called Thule, possibly Iceland.  

They thought of the southern ends of the earth as what they called “Ethiopia,” meaning Africa south of Egypt. In addition to important trade ties with China over the Silk Road (and Roman merchants traveling as far as Vietnam), they had trade ties as far south in Africa as Tanzania. The most common sense of “Ethiopia” involved the Nubian kingdom of Meroë, so that Philip is proleptically reaching the southern “ends of the earth” already when he shares good news with an official from that kingdom later in Acts (8:26-40).

The “ends of the earth” thus does not simply involve Rome, where Luke’s narrative ends. Yet Rome is strategic for his narrative,
because Luke writes to people in the Roman Empire for whom the evangelization of Rome would impact the entire empire, the sphere where most of his original audience lived. Paul reaching Rome in Acts 28 is thus a proleptic fulfillment of the mission, like Philip preaching to the African official or Peter preaching to the Diaspora crowds present at the feast of Pentecost. Acts does not conclude with the completion of the mission but offers a model for its continuance and completion: the good news to the ends of the earth, including parts of the world that Luke’s audience could not have known about. We may add that if any starting point was privileged, it was Jerusalem (cf. also Rom 15:19), but otherwise God’s people have just started where they were. When the west sent most missionaries, the west may have been their own practical starting point, but missions has never been a distinctly western idea. Indeed, in ancient Mediterranean conceptualizations of the world, the movement of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome specifically involved an Asian movement missionizing southern Europe.

Another biblical allusion appears in Acts 1:9-11, in addition to the allusion in Acts 1:8. This allusion, like the allusion to Isaiah we have


noted above, also implies Spirit-empowered witness, because it evokes the model of prophetic empowerment. In this passage, Jesus ascends to heaven after promising the Spirit. The most obvious allusion to an ascension that Luke could expect all of his biblically informed audience to catch is an allusion to Elijah. 29 When he ascended to heaven, he left for Elisha, his successor, a double portion of the Spirit who had rested on him (2 Kgs 2:9-14). 30 As that OT account provided for the transition between narratives about Elijah’s ministry and those about Elisha’s, so the present account functions as a transition between Jesus’ ministry in Luke’s Gospel and that of his appointed agents in Acts. 31 Again, we see an allusion to the same Spirit who empowered the prophets.

2. Preparation for Pentecost (Acts 1:12-26)

Although we will address preparation for Pentecost much more briefly than the promise of Pentecost, this account is also crucial to Luke’s point. Part of the narrative involves reestablishing the leadership structure of the Twelve, assigned by Jesus, presumably (as in some other ancient models) as an expression of expectation in Israel’s restoration. 32 For them to restore the leadership structure was


32 See discussion in Turner, Power, 301; Pao, Isaianic Exodus, 123-29. Most scholars recognize the choice of the Twelve as symbolizing a restoration
to prepare for Jesus’ promise in faith. Some things happen only when God is ready, but he allows those who trust him to prepare for them in advance (e.g., 1 Chron 22:14-16; 28:11-19).


4:31, they were filled with the Spirit. Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Spirit (8:15). Saul was filled with the Spirit (9:17) after he had been praying (9:11). The Spirit likewise fell on Cornelius and his guests (10:44), and Cornelius had been praying (10:30). Although Luke does not always associate the Spirit with prayer, the connection is frequent enough, and sometimes clear enough (especially in 4:31), to reinforce the importance of prayer in preparing for the Spirit’s coming. Luke’s first volume is most explicit on this point: the discussion of prayer in Lk 11:1-13 climaxes in prayer’s chief object, the gift of God’s own person and presence, namely, the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13). In that passage, Jesus promises that God will not withhold this blessing from any who ask and seek insistently for it.  

3. The Proofs of Pentecost (2:2-4)

Three signs publicly demonstrate the Spirit’s coming on the day of Pentecost: wind (2:2), fire (2:3), and worship in languages unknown to the speakers (2:4). Of the three, the third will call for the greatest comment.

The wind and fire here both evoke earlier biblical theophanies (e.g., Ex 3:2; 2 Sam 5:24; 1 Kgs 19:11-12; Job 38:1; Ps 29:3-10; 97:2-5; 104:3; Is 6:4; 29:6; 30:27-28; 66:15; Ezek 1:4), and scholars often compare them with phenomena accompanying God’s revelation at Sinai (Ex 19:16-20; Deut 4:11, 24). Moreover, these theophanic
elements recall a theme that we observed earlier: the Spirit comes as a foretaste, an initial experience, of the future world. Wind evokes the image of end-time, resurrection life that may be inferred in Ezek 37:9, 14; fire often evoked eschatological judgment, including when paired with the Spirit in Lk 3:16 (see Lk 3:9, 17). The eschatological era was breaking into the present, a point reinforced explicitly by Peter’s opening explanation that the outpoured prophetic Spirit demonstrated the arrival of the “last days” (2:17), the eschatological time of salvation (2:20-21).

Tongues, however, is the most significant of the three signs for Luke, being repeated at initial outpourings in Acts 10:46 and 19:6. This speaking in tongues is also more strategic for Luke’s narrative because what follows hinges on it: tongues provides the catalyst for the multicultural audience’s recognition of God’s activity (2:5-13), and the

(AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 234. Scholars differ on whether this passage in Acts contains specific allusions to Sinai, however.


E.g., Is 26:11; 66:15-16, 24; CD 2.4-6; 1 En. 103:8; Sib. Or. 4.43, 161, 176-78; 2 Thess 1:6-7.

starting point for Peter’s message: “This is what Joel meant …” (2:16-17).

Further, tongues does not appear here arbitrarily, as one possible sign among many. Instead, it relates to Acts’ theme articulated in Acts 1:8: Spirit-inspired, cross-cultural witness. Luke recounts that they were “speaking in other languages even as the Spirit was giving them inspired utterance” (2:4). Peter goes on to explain the phenomenon biblically as a form of inspired, prophetic speech, noting that it fulfills Joel’s prediction that God’s people would prophesy (2:17-18). But Luke’s emphasis in 1:8 is prophetic witness for Christ, bringing the “word of the Lord” (e.g., 8:25; 12:24; 13:48-49). Why then does he choose to point to tongues as an important example of this, mentioning it at three distinct outpourings of the Spirit? Undoubtedly, Luke emphasizes the connection between tongues and the Spirit because it so well symbolizes his theme of Spirit-empowered cross-cultural witness. If God’s people can worship God in other people’s languages, how much more can they share the good news through languages that they share in common? That is, worshiping God in other people’s languages shows that God has empowered the church to cross all cultural and linguistic barriers with his gospel.43

Here is where early Pentecostals picked up on a connection that most (though not all) traditional scholars historically missed.44

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44Still, some others have seen the connection between tongues and crosscultural ministry or unity, especially earlier in history; see e.g., Origen Comm. Rom. on Rom 1:14; Chrysostom Hom. Cor. 35.1; Bede Comm. Acts 2.3A; Leo the Great
nineteenth-century radical evangelicals stressed holiness, missions, and healing. Many sought what they called the “baptism in the Holy Spirit” and were praying for God to provide “missionary tongues,” which they believed were supernaturally endowed languages that would enable them to skip the lengthy process of language-learning in missions.\(^{45}\)

The early Pentecostals experienced tongues-speaking in this expectant milieu.

The earliest Pentecostals sought “missionary tongues” and sought the Spirit for empowerment for mission (1:8).\(^{46}\) Many left for foreign countries to try out their “missionary tongues,” and many were cruelly disappointed. Although Pentecostals kept tongues for prayer (as in 1 Cor 14:13-14), most abandoned the “missionary tongues” idea.\(^{47}\) Yet

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at the risk of sounding controversial, I believe that they were right about the connection between missions and tongues-speaking that they saw in Acts. Granted, neither in Acts nor in early Pentecostalism did tongues provide a substitute for language-learning (nor, I might add regretfully, does it usually perform that service for scholars preparing for their doctoral language exams). While people have sometimes recognized the languages spoken, that does not seem to be the primary purpose of the gift.

Yet tongues is important precisely because it aptly illustrates Luke’s emphasis on the power of the Spirit to speak for God across cultural barriers. Tongues is not an arbitrary sign, but a sign that God has empowered his servants to exalt him in others’ languages. Even among charismatic scholars, there is not absolute agreement whether every individual who receives this empowerment prays in tongues. Nevertheless, those who observe Luke’s narrative closely should recognize, whatever their own experience or theology, that tongues evidences the character of the experience: God has empowered his witnesses to cross cultural barriers with his gospel.


It is probably no coincidence that Pentecostalism in one century experienced perhaps the most massive growth rates of any Christian movement in history, given that it was birthed in a context that emphasized holiness (uncompromised devotion to God), prayer, faith and missions. Of course, that connection also serves as a warning, because many movements that began with such emphases and growth rates eventually cooled and were supplanted by other movements of God’s Spirit. We do not retain the Spirit merely by retaining a heritage or tradition that enshrines a past experience of the Spirit, or simply repeating what our predecessors have done. As we have seen, the earliest Pentecostals were flexible, correcting their ideas where needed.\(^{50}\) To maintain the blessing that inaugurated Pentecostalism, we need what made it really work: God’s Spirit. As we noted at the beginning of this paper, we cannot do his work without him.

4. The Peoples of Pentecost (Acts 2:5-13)

Luke’s narrative goes on to reinforce the point that we have just observed with a proleptic foreshadowing of the gospel reaching the ends of the earth. Luke indicates the presence of Diaspora Jews “from every nation under heaven” (2:5). Although they are Jewish, the breadth of their geographic exposure foreshadows the mission to the nations laid out in 1:8,\(^{51}\) just like the African “ends of the earth” in 8:26-40 or evangelizing in the heart of the empire in 28:16-31.

Although there is no absolute consensus, most scholars think that Luke here alludes to the account of the Tower of Babel.\(^ {52}\) (This was

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the view of many ancient commentators⁵³ and early Pentecostals⁵⁴ as well as that of many modern scholars.) Luke provides a list of nations from which these Jewish worshipers came (2:9-11), and such a list would evoke most easily the Bible’s first list of nations in Gen 10.⁵⁵ That list was followed in Gen 11:1-9 by God coming down to scatter the languages.⁵⁶ Whereas God scatters languages there in judgment, he scatters languages here to bring a new cross-cultural unity in the Spirit.⁵⁷

Cross-cultural unity is a major activity of the Spirit. The Azusa Street Revival occurred in a historical context of revivals elsewhere in


⁵³Cyril of Jerusalem Catechetical Lecture 17.16-17; Arator Acts 1; Bede Comm. Acts 2.4; patristic sources in Marguerat, Actes, 81 n. 45.

⁵⁴Anderson, Pentecostalism, 44.


⁵⁶With Goulder, Type and History, 158.

the world, including the Welsh Revival and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pandita Ramabai’s orphanage in India. The major human figure providing leadership in the Azusa Street Revival was William Seymour, an African-American man of prayer, in a time of severe racial segregation in the United States; the revival was multicultural. Frank Bartleman, a white American participant in the revival, celebrated that “The color line was washed away by the blood.” Unfortunately, it was washed away only temporarily, before the social realities of Jim Crow laws in the southern U.S. and other factors led to a new segregation. Seymour’s white mentor Charles Parham criticized the events at Azusa Street in racial terms, and Seymour, feeling betrayed, shifted the focus that his preaching emphasized in Acts 2. Seymour noted that in Acts 2, the outpouring of the Spirit involved crossing cultural barriers. The true reception of the Spirit must involve ethnic reconciliation and unity among Christ’s followers. Most nations in the world have minority cultures among them; most of us can think of people groups that are despised by or hostile to our own. As Seymour came to emphasize through his bitter experience with Parham, the true experience of the Spirit must go beyond speaking in other people’s languages under the inspiration of

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60 Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 72-73; see similarly in India, Yong, *Spirit Poured*, 56-57.

the Spirit. We need to work for that unity to which tongues-speaking points.

The rest of Acts develops this theme. For example, despite the conflict between Hebrews and Hellenists in 6:1, the new Hellenist leaders are themselves full of the Spirit (6:3, 5, 10; 7:51, 55). These bicultural ministers carry the mission forward across a cultural barrier not yet breached by the Twelve, setting the example for them (e.g., 8:25). The Spirit continues to drive God’s own resistant people across cultural barriers (8:29; 10:19; 15:28); God baptizes new groups in the Spirit so that they become the Jerusalem believers’ partners in mission, not just recipients of their ministry (8:15-17; 10:44-46; 19:6).

5. The Prophecy of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21)

As we have been noting, the disciples’ worship in other tongues (2:4) fulfilled Joel’s prophecy about prophetic empowerment (2:16-18). As readers of this passage have long noted: when the crowd heard “this” sound (2:6), they asked, “What does ‘this’ [praise in many languages] mean?” (2:12; cf. 2:11). Peter then responded, “‘This’ fulfills what Joel said” (2:16) about God’s people prophesying (2:17-18).

In light of Joel, all God’s people are now to be empowered as end-time prophets for Christ. Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32, but he also adapts the wording at points to bring out the meaning (a common Jewish practice). Joel said that God would pour out the Spirit “afterward”—

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62 The seven selected in 6:5 are surely Hellenists, given that all had Greek names (a unanimity that is surely deliberate, with e.g., Craig C. Hill, *Hellenists and Hebrews: Reappraising Division within the Earliest Church* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 47). Even in Rome, where only 1% of Jewish inscriptions are in Semitic languages, 15.2% of the names include Semitic elements (Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* [Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960], 107-8).

63 For Philip as Peter’s “forerunner,” in terms of narrative function, see F. Scott Spencer, *The Portrait of Philip in Acts. A Study of Role and Relations* (JSNTSup 67; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 220-41.

64 For the connection, cf. e.g., Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 1:119.

in the context, after a period of terrible judgment (Joel 2:25-27), at the
time of Israel’s restoration (3:1). Emphasizing that the eschatological
promise was now being fulfilled, Peter adapts the wording in line with
the original context: God pours out the Spirit “in the last days” (Acts
2:17). “Last days” is eschatological language, yet it was being
fulfilled already in the present (cf. similarly Rom 8:22; 1 Tim 4:1; 2
Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; 2 Pet 3:3; Rev 12:5-6, 10). Peter’s adaptation
underlines the fact that Jesus’ first coming had already introduced the
end-time, though it will be consummated only with his return.

Peter adds another line that highlights the prophetic nature of the
gift: “And they will prophesy” (2:18). This line simply reiterates what
Peter has already quoted directly from Joel: “your sons and daughters
will prophesy”; they will also dream dreams and see visions (2:17),
experiences most typical in biblical history for prophets. Acts is full of
examples of such activity, which are meant to characterize the Spirit-
empowered, eschatological people of God, i.e., the church.

The universality of the gift is one of its most striking features in
this passage. The promise involves “sons and daughters,” that is, both

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Stanley, Paul and the language of Scripture: Citation technique in the Pauline
Epistles and contemporary literature (SNTSMS 69; Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1992), 291; cf. 335, 337, 342-44. Targum typically proved
more expansive (though apparently more in later targumim), and midrash even
more so. A primary function of midrash was to reapply texts to contemporary
settings (Addison G. Wright, “The Literary Genre Midrash,” CBQ 28 [2, April
1966]: 105-38, here 133-34).

E.g., Is 2:2; Ezek 38:16; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1; Dan 2:28; 11Q13, 2.4; 1 En. 27:3-4; T. Iss. 6:1.

In Ecuador, women Pentecostals tend to prophesy and have visions more
(though prophetic dreams less) than men (Joseph L. Castleberry, “It’s Not Just
for Ignorant People Anymore: The Future Impact of University Graduates on
the Development of the Ecuadorian Assemblies of God” [Ed.D. dissertation,
Teachers College, Columbia University, 1999], 142). Historically, many
women have found empowerment for their ministry in this text (Janice Capel
Anderson, “Reading Tabitha: A Feminist Reception History,” 108-44 in The
New Literary Criticism and the New Testament [ed. Edgar V. McKnight and
Elizabeth Struthers Malbon; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International,
1994; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994]), particularly prominently in
Pentecostalism (see Janet Everts Powers, “‘Your Daughters Shall Prophesy’:
Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Empowerment of Women,” 313-37 in
Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel [ed. Douglas
Petersen, et al.; Oxford: Regnum, 1999], 318; Yong, Spirit Poured, 190-94; in
early Pentecostalism, see Wacker, Heaven, 158-65 [though note countervailing
prophetesses with male prophets (Lk 2:26-38; Acts 21:9-11; cf. Lk 1:41-45, 67-79); because Philip has four prophesying daughters, Luke actually mentions more prophetesses than prophets. The mention of young and old (Acts 2:17) shows that the gift is for all ages; although ancient Mediterranean society respected elders, Luke reports the prophetic young daughters of Philip (21:9) as well as the aged widow Anna (Lk 2:36-37). Luke obliterates the class distinction in Joel’s promise that the Spirit will also fall on slaves (Joel 2:29), but only because Luke emphasizes that the prophets are God’s slaves (Acts 2:18), a common biblical designation for prophets. This does not count the likelihood of the “prophets” in Acts 11:27 being male, since a gender-mixed company would be less likely to travel together in this period (except with relatives; Lk 8:2-3 was exceptional). But of these prophets, only Agabus is given an active role in the narrative (11:28).

E.g., Homer Il. 1.259; 23.616-23; Livy 5.25.3; 6.24.7; Diogenes Laertius 8.1.22 (Pythagoras); Pliny Ep. 8.14.4, 6; Select Papyri 3, pp. 476-77, §116; 4 Bar. 5:20; Sir 8:6; Ps.-Phoc. 220-222; Syriac Menander Sentences 11-14; Epitome 2-4; t. Meg. 3:24; 1 Tim 5:1-2; 1 Pet 5:5. Also in some other societies (e.g., Confucius Analects 2.8; 13.20).

“Virgins” probably suggests that they are no older than their teens, since women usually married young and “virgins” thus often functioned as a designation for age. Comparing Mishnaic usage, Hilary Le Cornu with Joseph Shulam. A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Acts (Jerusalem: Nitivyah Bible Instruction Ministry, 2003), 1159, suggests that they had not yet reached puberty.

Finnly Philip, The Origins of Pauline Pneumatology: The Eschatological Bestowal of the Spirit upon Gentiles in Judaism and in the Early Development of Paul’s Theology (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 213, suggests that this limits “all flesh” to all believers.

“male” and “female” servants reinforces the transcending of gender barriers.

But perhaps of most immediate importance for Luke’s larger narrative in Acts is Joel’s “all flesh” (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). The point of the phrase that may elude Peter within the narrative at this point will be obvious to Luke’s own audience (cf. Lk 2:32; 4:25-27); for them it may recall a programmatic text from Isaiah, cited in Lk 3:6, about “all flesh” seeing God’s salvation. When Peter concludes the sermon with an echo of Is 57:19, indicating that the promise of the Spirit is for all who are “far off,” whoever God will call (Acts 2:39), he reinforces (again perhaps unknown to himself at that point) God’s plan to transcend all cultural barriers to reach all peoples (cf. 22:21). God wants to pour out his Spirit on everyone who will call on his name.


Although 2:22-40 is one of the longest sections we are covering, my comments here will be relatively brief. In keeping with the preaching throughout Acts, this passage underlines the sort of Christocentric message that the Spirit particularly empowers. Having quoted the passage from Joel relevant to the current outpouring of the Spirit, Peter now begins to explain the part of that passage most relevant to his audience: “whoever calls on the Lord’s name will be saved” (Acts 2:21).

Joel announced that “whoever calls on the name of YHWH will be delivered,” among “those whom the Lord calls” (Joel 2:32). In Acts, Peter breaks off the quote at “whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21) and then picks up some of the rest of it at Acts 2:39: “as many as the Lord our God shall call.” In accord with common midrashic procedure, between these two lines he is expounding the line he has quoted. Given that the eschatological time, the time of salvation, has broken in upon them, they must now call on the Lord’s name to be saved.75


74 Pao, Isaiahic Exodus, 230-32.

But what is the Lord’s name on which the text invites them to call? The Hebrew text of Joel refers to YHWH, but Jewish people generally avoided pronouncing the divine name, and the Greek text uses the normal surrogate for YHWH, namely, “lord.” By linking together texts with common key words, a common Jewish interpretive technique, Peter shows that Jesus is the “Lord” at the right hand of the Father, hence the “Lord” on whom they are to call. (He thereby implicitly preaches Jesus’ deity.) The apostolic witnesses (and the Spirit) testify that Jesus has risen, and Peter argues that Scripture makes the theological implications of this reality for their situation clear. In Ps 16:8-11 the risen one (according to Peter’s application) is at God’s side (Acts 2:25-28); in Ps 110:1, the one at God’s right hand is the “Lord” (Acts 2:34-35). They must therefore call on the name of the divine Lord, Jesus.

For Peter, this “calling on” the Lord Jesus is not simply reciting a prayer; it is a public profession, and one that was no less offensive in that culture than John the Baptist immersing fellow Israelites as if they were Gentiles. The concrete expression of “calling on” the Lord that Peter demands is repentance and baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ” (2:38). Baptism in Jesus’ name in Acts does not involve a formula that one says over a person being baptized; the expression “in Jesus’ name” accompanies the verb for “baptize” only when it is in the passive voice, i.e., when people are receiving baptism. It thus involves not the baptizer’s formula, but the prayer of one receiving baptism (cf. 22:16: “be baptized … calling on his name”). The temple mount was full of


76E.g., Mek. Pisha 5.103; Nez. 10.15-16, 26, 38; 17.17; in this passage, see Richard N. Longenecker, Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 97.

baptismal pools for ceremonial washings;\textsuperscript{78} to publicly accept immersion as would one turning from former Gentiles ways, however, constituted a radical declaration of new obedience.


God poured out the Spirit to empower his people to evangelize cross-culturally, but what was the anticipated outcome of cross-cultural evangelism? God intended to create a new community in which believers would love one another and demonstrate to this age the very image of the life of his kingdom.

We can see this purpose of evangelism in the structure of this closing paragraph of this opening section of Acts:\textsuperscript{79}

- **Effective evangelism** (2:41)
  - Shared worship, meals, and prayer (2:42)
    - Shared \textit{possessions} (2:44-45)
  - Shared worship, meals, and prayer (2:46)
- **Effective evangelism** (2:47)

At the heart of the outcome of the new life of the Spirit is not only the Spirit’s power and gifting for ministry, but what we might call (in Paul’s language) the Spirit’s “fruit.” Spirit-empowered believers loved one another so much that they valued one another more than they valued their possessions (2:44-45).\textsuperscript{80} Just as tongues is repeated at


\textsuperscript{79}Acts 2:41-47 is the first major summary section; for discussions of such sections, see e.g., H. Alan Brehm, “The Significance of the Summaries for Interpreting Acts,” \textit{SWJ} 33 (1, 1990): 29-40; S. J. Joubert, “Die gesigpunt van die verteller en die funksie van die Jerusalemgemeente binne die ‘opsommings’ in Handelinge,” \textit{SK} 10 (1, 1989): 21-35.

various initial outpourings of the Spirit, this sharing of possessions recurs as a dominant element in the revival in 4:31-35, underlining the importance of this theme (cf. also Lk 12:33; 13:33). Whereas Peter’s preaching leads to many converts on one occasion in Acts 2:41, it is the believing community’s lifestyle that leads to continuous conversions in 2:47.

It also fits a pattern in Luke’s theology of Christian transformation. When the crowds ask Peter what they must do to be saved, he summons them to repent and be baptized in Jesus’ name (2:38). But this passage goes on to show us something of what a repentant lifestyle looks like. This fits a pattern of answers to the “What must I do?” question in Luke-Acts. When John the Baptist demands the fruits of repentance (Lk 3:8) and the crowds ask what to do, John admonishes whoever has more than their basic subsistence needs to share the rest with those who have less (Lk 3:11). When a rich ruler asks Jesus what he must do to have eternal life (Lk 18:18), Jesus urges him to donate all his resources to the poor and follow him (Lk 18:22). Even later, when the Philippian jailer asks Paul and Silas, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30), they respond that he must believe in the Lord Jesus (16:31). Lest that seem like a lesser demand than those mentioned above, consider that the jailer then brought them to his own house and fed them (16:34), behavior that could have gotten him in serious trouble with the authorities. After all, he was ordered to securely guard these people.

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Dining with prisoners could be punishable even by death (Josephus Ant. 18.230-33; Brian Rapske, The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody [vol. 3
who were accused of preaching customs illegal for Philippian citizens to observe (16:21).

In Luke-Acts, true conversion involves repentance and commitment to a new Lord. Such commitment to the new Lord also involves commitment to one’s new siblings in the new community. As Acts progresses, it becomes clear that this new community will not belong to simply one culture, its table fellowship circumscribed by sacred food customs (10:28; 16:34; 27:35-36). Sometimes Christians in Acts do prove reluctant to cross such boundaries (10:28; 11:3; cf. Gal 2:11-14), just as the Pharisees had about Jesus’ table fellowship with repenting sinners in Luke’s first volume (e.g., Lk 5:30; 7:34; 15:2); but God gives them no rest until he brings them past these barriers. God is creating a new community that transcends human boundaries. God empowers his people with the Spirit to cross cultural barriers, to worship God, and to form one new, multicultural community of worshipers committed to Christ and to one another.

Conclusion

Acts 1—2 is a pivotal section for Luke-Acts, revealing the importance and purpose of the Spirit’s empowerment for global mission. The promise of Pentecost (1:4-8) emphasizes the need for the Spirit, the eschatological character of the Spirit, and the prophetic empowerment dimension of the Spirit. Preparation for Pentecost (1:12—2:1) involves prayer together and getting ready for God’s


promise of the Spirit’s empowerment in faith. The proofs of Pentecost (2:2-4) reveal eschatological signs, with tongues-speaking signifying the Spirit’s empowerment for cross-cultural witness. The “peoples” of Pentecost (2:5-13), though Diaspora Jews, foreshadow the Gentile mission and probably evoke a partial inversion of Babel. The mission, this passage reiterates, is for all peoples. The prophecy of Pentecost (2:17-21) underlines the eschatological, prophetic and universal character of their empowerment. The preaching of Pentecost (2:22-40) models the Christocentric message that the Spirit particularly empowers. Finally, the purpose of Pentecost (2:41-47) involves the new community that the Spirit-inspired message is meant to form. The Spirit’s empowerment of the church is central for Luke, and is inseparable from the church’s mission in the present age.