



## The Work of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts

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**T**he Spirit, in the New Testament writings, is first and foremost the empowering presence and activity of God amongst and alongside his people.<sup>1</sup> But the various writers each give their own distinctive interest and emphases to pneumatology. Luke devotes particular attention to the topic, with some twenty references to the Spirit in the Gospel (compare with just six in Mark; twelve in Matthew), and a further *sixty* in Acts. The Spirit is a major uniting theme within his double-volumed work, indeed nothing less than the driving force of the “salvation history” and mission that Luke describes. In Luke 1-2, the Spirit brings about the birth of the Messiah who is to redeem Israel (1:32-35), affords prophecies relating to the saving events about to unfold (1:42-43, 67-79; 2:25-32), and empowers the Elijianic forerunner who prepares the way of the Lord (1:15, 17). In Luke 3-4 the Spirit then comes as Jesus’ messianic empowering for the redemptive mission, while Pentecost brings a parallel endowment for the church’s mission, over which the Spirit remains the initiator (cf. esp. Acts 2:4; 8:29; 10:19, 44; 11:12; 13:2, 4; etc.), the driving

<sup>1</sup>This is encapsulated in Gordon Fee’s title, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), but the same description would be apposite to both Judaism and to the other New Testament authors: see Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament Church and Today* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999), part I.

*The majority opinion of present scholarship argues that the Spirit in Luke-Acts was granted to those already saved, an added blessing empowering believers for service and mission. But this divides too sharply between soteriology and missiology. Keeping together salvation and witness is one of the cardinal contributions of Luke’s theology.*

power (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 4:31; 9:17, 31), the guide in significant decisions (16:6, 7; 19:21; 20:22-23), and the legitimator of the whole endeavor, especially at its most delicate points (cf. 5:32; 8:17-18; 10:44-45, 47; 11:15-18; 15:28).<sup>2</sup>

The centrality of the Spirit for Luke is thus clear. And for him the Spirit is most characteristically what Jewish believers probably would have called the “Spirit of prophecy”; in Acts especially as an “empowering for witness.”<sup>3</sup> Correspondingly, Luke is much less explicit than we might have expected about the Spirit as the basis of the spiritual, ethical, and religious life of the believer. This much is now happily agreed by virtually all Lucan scholars.<sup>4</sup> But within this accord there are still vital issues of interpretation of Luke’s view of the Spirit on which there is disagreement. The most important concern is how Luke understands the relationship of the gift of the Spirit to salvation. What now appears to be the majority position (argued chiefly by Pentecostal/charismatic scholars, but also by those outside that tradition) essentially holds that Luke regards the gift of the Spirit to believers exclusively as a prophetic/charismatic empowering for service and mission. Within this view the “Spirit of prophecy” is by its very nature a gift granted to those who are *already* “saved”—hence the Spirit (in Luke-Acts) has sometimes been called a “*donum superadditum*”; literally, “an additional gift” (“additional,” that is, to the grace of salvation) or “second-blessing.” One has only to consider the reception of the Spirit by Jesus (Luke 3:21-22) and by the apostles (Acts 2:1-4) to see the point. Others argue that while the Pentecost gift of the Spirit is indeed primarily the charismatic “Spirit of prophecy,” this gift of the Spirit also brings the believer his or her experience of salvation. In what follows we shall first outline the strengths of the majority view (Part I); we shall then note two important false antitheses often introduced by this interpretation (Part II), before finally reexamining in more detail the relationship of the gift of the Spirit to Luke’s soteriology (Part III).

#### PART I—LUKE’S “SPIRIT OF PROPHECY” AS A *DONUM SUPERADDITUM*

The most significant author of the majority view is the young Pentecostal scholar Robert Menzies, and he rightly begins with the Jewish understanding of the Spirit, which forms the resource on which Jesus and the New Testament writers

<sup>2</sup>The last two sentences are taken with minor modification from Turner, *Spirit*, 39.

<sup>3</sup>The three works that have most profoundly affected current understanding of these last two crucial points are Eduard Schweizer, “πνεῦμα, πνευματικός,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 6:389-455; G. Haya-Prats, *L’Esprit Force de l’Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1975); and Robert P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology with Special Reference to Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: SAP, 1991), later rewritten as the more accessible *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: SAP, 1994).

<sup>4</sup>For a history of scholarship demonstrating this from Hans von Baer’s magisterial monograph (1926) to the present, see my *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: SAP, 1996), chs. 1-2. A quite different interpretation was powerfully presented by James Dunn’s *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-Examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM, 1970), which argued that Luke understood the Spirit primarily as the presence of salvation, the kingdom of God, and “sonship.” But Dunn has since moved somewhat closer to what is otherwise the consensus position: cf. James D. G. Dunn, “Baptism in the Spirit: A Response to Pentecostal Scholarship on Luke-Acts,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 3 (1993) 3-27.

chiefly drew. Within that tradition, he argues (in considerable detail),<sup>5</sup> the Spirit was understood almost exclusively as the source of inspired speech, revelation, and esoteric wisdom—not as a gift a person needs to receive in order to *experience* salvation, nor as the source of spiritual/ethical renewal, nor as the power of miraculous activities in the physical realm (such as healings).

It was this conception, argues Menzies, that dominated in earliest Christianity and is best preserved in Luke-Acts. While Mark and Matthew had expanded the scope of the Spirit's work to cover Jesus' miraculous deeds of healing, exorcism, etc., Luke kept the more authentically Jewish notion (hence, for example, Luke changes Matthew's "Spirit of God" [Matt 12:28] to "finger of God" [Luke 11:20] to avoid the impression that the Spirit effects exorcisms). Contra Dunn, for Luke, Jesus' reception of the Spirit at his baptism (3:21-22) is not the means of his own inner experience of the kingdom of God and of eschatological sonship, rather—as the paradigmatic sermon in Nazareth indicates (esp. 4:18-21)—it is the endowment of Jesus, as the prophet like Moses, to proclaim the messianic fulfillment of the hopes of Isa 61:1-2.<sup>6</sup>

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The case is similar with the disciples of Jesus. At the important midpoint of Luke's double work (Luke 24 and Acts 1-2), they are promised they will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5), and this is specifically elucidated as “power from on high” to witness (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). When the Spirit comes on the day of Pentecost, Peter explains the gift in terms of the promise in Joel 2:28-32—the *locus classicus* of the Old Testament for the expectation of an outpouring of the Spirit as the “Spirit of prophecy” (2:16-21, 33). And it is precisely *this* gift that Peter promises to *all* who repent and turn to Christ according to 2:38-39 (these verses use the very wording of Joel in order to express the promise). More important, virtually all the relevant passages in Acts *depict the Spirit as providing the prototypical gifts of the Spirit of prophecy*.

(a) The Spirit is thus the author of *revelatory visions* and of *dreams*: programmatically at 2:17, but also specifically at Acts 7:55-56 (and Luke would probably trace such vision/dream guidance as Acts 9:10-18; 10:10-20; 16:9-10 and 18:9-10; 22:17-18, 21; 23:11 to the Spirit [note the specific mention of Spirit in these contexts, 10:19; 16:6-7]).

(b) The Spirit gives *revelatory words* or *instruction* or *guidance*, sometimes making direct reference to similar activity in the Old Testament: Acts 1:2;

<sup>5</sup>Menzies, *Empowered*, chs. 2-5.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, chs. 7-9.

1:16 (=OT); 4:25 (=OT); 7:51 (=OT); 8:29; 10:19; 11:12, 28; 13:2, 4; 15:28; 16:6-7; 19:21; 20:22, 23; 21:4, 11; and 28:25 (=OT).

(c) The Spirit grants *charismatic wisdom* or *revelatory discernment*: Luke 21:15 and Acts 5:3; 6:3, 5, 10; 9:31; 13:9; and 16:8.

(d) The Spirit inspires *invasive charismatic praise*, e.g., the tongues on the day of Pentecost: Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6.

(e) The Spirit inspires *charismatic preaching* or *witness*: Acts 1:4, 8; 4:8, 31; 5:32; 6:10; 9:17 or *charismatic teaching* 9:31; 13:52; and 18:25. This is not strictly anticipated in Judaism, but it is an obvious extension of the Jewish concept of the Spirit as the “Spirit of prophecy” (combining some of the above) and derives from pre-Lucan Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

In all this, it is argued, the gift of the Spirit is evidently exclusively an “empowering for mission” (as long as the latter term is suitably qualified). It is in essence empowerment for witness (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8):<sup>8</sup> indeed a gift that constitutes the people of God as prophets.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Paul and John, the Spirit for Luke is not the power of salvation, but the charismatic/prophetic Spirit given to those *who have already entered* the community of salvation. For this reason it is not unnatural to him that some people receive the gift of the Spirit *subsequent to* conversion and/or baptism (e.g., the Samaritans of Acts 8, Paul in Acts 9, and the Ephesian twelve in Acts 19).<sup>10</sup>

## PART II—TWO FALSE ANTITHESES IN THE CONSTRUCT OF LUKE’S “SPIRIT OF PROPHECY”?

There can be little doubt that the majority position is fundamentally right in what it asserts; but we may suspect it is almost equally misleading in what it denies. While we may affirm that for Luke the Spirit is exclusively the “Spirit of prophecy,” the question is whether scholars from Schweizer to Menzies have not imported into the heart of that concept two significant false antitheses.

The first, much less important, antithesis concerns their disjunction between the activities of the Spirit and miraculous works of power. There is important evidence that Judaism attributed such works to the Spirit (of prophecy) much more freely than Menzies admits, not least in the messianic traditions based in Isaiah 11:1-5.<sup>11</sup> And Menzies agrees that Jesus himself did so (cf. Mark 3:28-30 and Matt

<sup>7</sup>See Turner, *Spirit*, ch. 3, for details (here drawing on 43-44); more fully, Turner, *Power*, chs. 3, 10, and 12.

<sup>8</sup>So Menzies, *Empowered for Witness* (the title chosen is not accidental!); also John Michael Penney, *The Missionary Emphasis of Lukan Pneumatology* (Sheffield: SAP, 1997).

<sup>9</sup>Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke’s Charismatic Theology* (Sheffield: SAP, 1999). But this claim appears to go beyond and against the evidence: see my “Does Luke Believe Reception of the ‘Spirit of Prophecy’ makes all ‘Prophets’? Inviting Dialogue with Roger Stronstad,” in *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 20 (2000) 3-24.

<sup>10</sup>See Menzies, *Empowered*, chs. 10-12 (the last specifically tackling the theology of “subsequence”).

<sup>11</sup>See Turner, *Spirit*, ch. 1, and *Power*, ch. 4, for a full discussion of the evidence.

1:18, 20; 12:15-18, 28[!]). But he argues that (in order better to preserve the authentically Jewish notion of the “Spirit of prophecy”) Luke edited the gospel tradition to attribute such miracles more directly to the *power* of God than to the Spirit. This, however, appears to create a false antithesis, especially in such key texts as Luke 1:35; 4:14; and Acts 10:38, and it requires that Luke introduces the quite *un-Jewish* notion that the Spirit generates “power,” and that this “power” subsequently works the miracles. In these texts, and paradigmatically at Luke 4:18-21, it is much easier to understand that the Spirit is itself the eschatological power of God, active in the physical realm as much as in the personal/existential.<sup>12</sup>

The more serious antithesis posited by scholarship in the Schweizer-Menzies axis is that between the work of the Spirit and spiritual/ethical transformation. For Schweizer, the very fact that Luke understood the Spirit as the “Spirit of prophecy” prevented him from attributing the new “life” of the community in Acts to the Spirit. Menzies tries to substantiate that Jews (by and large) would not attribute transformatory religious/ethical life to the Spirit, and that while there are some rare examples of this, especially in Qumran hymns and Wisdom of Solomon, these belong to the period *after* Pentecost and the beginnings of Christianity. Such a view first entered Christianity through Paul and John, for whom the gift of the Spirit becomes the gift of the life of salvation, but was not adopted by Luke.<sup>13</sup> For him, the gift of the Spirit of prophecy is logically and theologically subsequent to salvation: it is given to those who are already the obedient people of God (cf. Acts 5:32).

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At the heart of this view appears to be a misunderstanding that there is conceptually a necessary antithesis between the “Spirit of prophecy,” as the enabling power of special revelations or esoteric wisdom, and some more fundamental work of ethical transformation and obedient walk with God. But there are good reasons to think this is not true of either Judaism or Christianity. For significant sections of the former, the “Spirit of prophecy” as the self-manifesting presence of God is *ipso facto* also profoundly transformatory (and that is especially clear in the Qumran hymns, which are almost certainly pre-Christian).<sup>14</sup> And the same is essentially the core of Paul’s and John’s thinking: for them it is precisely the Spirit’s revelatory and wisdom-granting roles which enable that transforming relational knowledge of the Father, and of the exalted Son, which is the very essence of

<sup>12</sup>Compare Menzies, *Empowered*, chs. 8-9, and Turner, *Power*, chs. 6, 8, and 9.

<sup>13</sup>Menzies, *Empowered*, ch.12; *Development*, chs. 12-13.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. my *Spirit*, ch. 1, and *Power*, ch. 5. The argument appears confirmed now by John R. Levison, *The Spirit in First Century Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

the life of “salvation.”<sup>15</sup> The question is then whether Luke is any different. If “salvation” for Luke is simply the status of forgiveness of sins (consequent on believing the gospel), membership of the people of God, and assured hope of final redemption, then there is no reason to assume he considered a person needed to receive the “Spirit of prophecy” in order to be “saved.” But if he considered present salvation to include not only these but also participation in God’s dynamic, liberating, restoring, and transforming eschatological reign—the kingdom of God—then we must explain *how* such could be present beyond Jesus’ resurrection-exaltation, and the obvious candidate would be “in and through the Pentecost gift of the Spirit.” The way the narrative of Luke-Acts develops strongly suggests he understood salvation in this broader sense and that it was an integral part of the work of the Spirit of prophecy.

### PART III — LUKE’S “SPIRIT OF PROPHECY” AS THE POWER OF ISRAEL’S RESTORATION AND MISSION

We may briefly highlight the contribution of Luke’s narrative development to our understanding of the topic under six heads.<sup>16</sup>

(1) Luke 1-2 sets the scene, with hearts bursting with hope that God would soon “return” to Israel in kingly rule, to bring her redemption through the Elijianic prophet (John the Baptist) and above all through the awaited Davidic “Son of God.” This salvation anticipated is very much the restoration of Israel as a light to the world, modeled on the core new exodus hopes of Isa 40-65.

(2) With Luke 3-4 the hour dawns. John announces that the coming messiah will cleanse and purify (=baptize) Israel with fiery Holy Spirit (3:16-18); Jesus receives the Spirit as the anointing of the messianic herald of Isa 42 (Luke 3:21-22) and shortly afterwards steps onto the public stage proclaiming the beginning of the Isaianic liberation and restoration (4:18-21).

(3) Much of the rest of Luke’s Gospel, however, appears at first sight a great anticlimax (cf. Cleopas’s words in 24:17-21). In the ministry of Jesus people have had some taste of the kingdom of God—through the Spirit on the Messiah—but *Israel has largely remained unchanged*. For the unwary reader, the removal of Jesus through death-resurrection-ascension might thus be expected to bring to a close any experience of the kingdom of God this side of the Parousia (so Conzelmann). Has the promised Isaianic new exodus restoration been forgotten, or indefinitely postponed?

(4) Not at all! That is what the end of Luke 24 and the beginning of Acts is all about. Now, at last, the Spirit will be poured out as the transforming “power from

<sup>15</sup>This is the essence of the argument of my *Spirit*, chs. 4-8; it is further supported by Mehrdad Fatehi, *The Spirit’s Relation to the Risen Lord in Paul: An Examination of Its Christological Implications* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2000), and Cornelis Bennema, *The Power of Saving Wisdom: An Investigation of Spirit and Wisdom in Relation to the Soteriology of the Fourth Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2002).

<sup>16</sup>For such an approach, but restricted to the pneumatological material, see Ju Hur, *A Dynamic Reading of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: SAP, 2001).

on high” promised in Isa 32:15 and 44:3 (note the prominent allusions to the former of these texts in the wording of Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8!). Now, at Pentecost, the people of God, gathered round the twelve apostolic leaders of Israel, will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (1:5), who will turn the arid wilderness of their existence into lush and flourishing growth. Now they will be restored to become the servant-witness “to the end of the earth” (note again the striking allusion to Isa 49:6 embedded in Acts 1:8). In short, these transitional sections of Luke-Acts anticipate some *fuller* experience of God’s reign/salvation to come at Pentecost. In this respect, Acts 2:33-36 fulfils the hopes of Luke 1:32-33 onwards. But it is precisely through the gift of the Spirit that this “salvation” is poured out: only through the Spirit can the ongoing messianic/transformational reign of Jesus continue to be experienced by his people (and, hence, the Holy Spirit is also now called “the Spirit of Jesus”; cf. Acts 16:7).

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(5) If Jesus’ death fulfills the Passover and looks forward to the new covenant (Luke 22:14-20), Pentecost is portrayed as the fulfillment of Sinai (Acts 2)—including a corresponding ascent on high of Israel’s leader to receive a foundational gift for the people of God (2:33). And, given the above, *the new radical and paradisaical community life depicted as the immediate consequence of Pentecost* (2:42-47 and cf. 4:32-35) *should almost certainly be interpreted as a result of reception of the gift of the Spirit* (pace Schweizer *et al.*). It entirely accords with the Isaianic expectation of the Spirit as the power of Israel’s restoration. The community’s experience of being “baptized with Holy Spirit” is no mere “second blessing”; it is the fulfillment of the promise of its richly transforming “salvation.”<sup>17</sup>

(6) This explains why Luke’s narrative anticipates that believers are *expected* to receive the Spirit within the context of conversion-initiation. He indicates such a norm at 2:38-39, but even the apparent exceptions he describes support the general rule. The narrator’s “explanation” in Acts 8:16 is redundant unless it would normally be expected that the Spirit be given at conversional baptism, and the delay (only a few days!) is treated as an aberration to be remedied forthwith. Similarly, when Paul (Acts 19:1-7) encounters “disciples” who have not even heard of the gift of the Spirit, he immediately asks what sort of baptism it was then (19:3)—a question that assumes the two are normally related. When he discovers they have not even heard that Jesus is the coming one John promised, he has them submit to

<sup>17</sup>See the argument of *Power*, chs. 12 and 13, for the detail; and it is augmented by my “The Spirit in Luke-Acts: A Support or a Challenge to Classical Pentecostal Paradigms?” *Vox evangelica* 27 (1997) 75-101, and “Interpreting the Samaritans of Acts 8: The Waterloo of Pentecostal Soteriology and Pneumatology?” *Pneuma* 23 (2001) 265-286. The recent work of David Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2000), shows how extensively the soteriology of Acts is rooted in the restorationist imagery of Deutero-Isaiah.

Christian baptism, and the Spirit is given in close connection with this (19:5-6). Why does Luke expect such a tight chronology (as Menzies and Penney agree he does)? It is not that he thinks all converts should instantly be turned into prophetic “witnesses” and proclaimers of the word. Indeed, slightly surprisingly, he does not appear to think the majority become directly involved in these activities at all (*pace* Penney).<sup>18</sup> But the close association of conversion and Spirit-reception would be entirely expected if the gift of the Spirit brings the individual and corporate *experience* of the salvation promised to repentant faith. This appears to be supported by the observation that many of the activities attributed to the Spirit are orientated towards *believers* (individuals and congregations) and their life before God, not merely towards mission (cf. Acts 5:1-11; 6:3-6; 9:31; 11:28; 13:52; 15:28; 19:21; 20:22-23, 28; 21:4, 11). This work of the Spirit as the power of Israel’s saving transformation and restoration has been most carefully elucidated by Matthias Wenk’s recent monograph.<sup>19</sup>

What we have just said in Part III is not to drive a wedge between the Spirit as the power of salvation and the Spirit as the Spirit of prophecy. For Luke they are one and the same. It is precisely *as* the self-revealing, wisdom-granting, transforming, and empowering presence of God (and of the risen Lord) that Luke’s “Spirit of prophecy” performs the full range of activities described in Acts. For Luke there is no sharp divide between soteriology and missiology: indeed, that is one of the cardinal contributions of his theology. ⊕

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<sup>18</sup>For the important but complex issues raised here see, e.g., my “Every Believer as a Witness in Acts? – in Dialogue with John Michael Penney,” *Ashland Theological Journal* 30 (1998) 57-71.

<sup>19</sup>Matthias Wenk, *Community-Forming Power: The Socio-Ethical Role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: SAP, 2000).