

## Keynote Address

# The Pentecost Paradigm for Pentecostalism: Power for Witness

Craig Keener

### Abstract

Historically, Pentecostalism has located its central biblical paradigm in Acts, especially in the Pentecost narrative. It therefore seems appropriate to introduce this discussion of Pentecostalism with a discussion of the narrative of Pentecost in Acts 1-2. This narrative includes the promise of being baptised in the Spirit to receive power for cross-cultural mission; not surprisingly, global mission has been central to Pentecostalism from its inception. In light of Luke-Acts as a whole, “power” In Acts 1:8 presumably includes healing and deliverance in the service of evangelism. Prayer in tongues (2:4) also evokes and facilitates cross-cultural mission in this narrative. Peter’s preaching interprets the experience of the Spirit as the prophetic empowerment promised in the biblical prophets, characterising the entire present era of the Spirit (2:17-18). And ultimately, the Spirit unites believers as a sacrificially loving community (2:41- 47).

### About the Author<sup>1</sup>

*PhD (Duke University)*

Dr Keener is a New Testament professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, has authored twenty-five books; many have won national or international awards. Over one million copies are in circulation, the most popular being The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, which provides cultural background on each passage of the New Testament. He has also authored 100 academic articles.

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

# 1. Introduction

At its best, pentecostalism reflects its biblical basis. Pentecostalism and its offshoots do not always live up to its best, but church history vividly reminds us of how often Christians in general do not. Pentecostalism started with some insights on the biblical text, including a continuationist reading of Scripture,<sup>2</sup> that has by now leavened much of Christianity with its important message. Biblical teaching about Pentecost, highlighted by the Pentecostal stream of Christianity, is not sectarian but is a message crucial for the wider body of Christ.

The focus of Acts is world evangelisation, or, more specifically, Spirit-empowered evangelism across cultural boundaries (Acts 1:8). I will not document heavily here, because the documentation appears at significantly great length in my 4,500-page Acts commentary,<sup>3</sup> and I have written other articles on related subjects at various levels.<sup>4</sup>

Acts 1—2, the introductory section of Acts, fulfils a crucial role in Luke's second volume. Like the beginning of subsequent volumes in some other multivolume works, Luke's second volume begins by recapitulating the end of the first volume. Luke intends more than a reminder, however: this is the pivotal transition between Luke's two volumes, but also the pivotal transition between Jesus's direct ministry on earth and his exalted ministry through the church. This is why Acts 1:1 summarises the first volume as 'all that Jesus *began* to do and teach,' and why his servants act 'in his name' (Acts 3:6, 16; 4:10, 18, 30; 5:40; 9:27; 16:18; 19:13). It is why Peter can later mediate healing to a disabled man with the declaration, 'Jesus Christ heals you' (9:34).

Acts 1—2 introduces an emphasis on empowerment for crosscultural witness, epitomised most directly in Acts 1:8. Some (although by no means all) ancient works included a proposition or thesis statement of their work, and Acts 1:8 functions well as such. Jesus commissions his agents to be witnesses... *to the ends of the earth* by the power of God's Spirit. I will develop this point further later.

One could outline some of the key points in this section as follows. (This outline is admittedly homiletical rather than structural. I do not normally use alliteration, but enough words begin with 'p' to make it work fairly well in this case.)

1. The Promise of Pentecost (1:4–8)
2. Preparation for Pentecost (prayer, leadership) (1:12–26)
3. The Proofs of Pentecost (2:1–4)

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Craig S Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016): 54–56, and passim; 'Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation/Spirit Hermeneutics,' pp. 270–83 in *Scripture and Its Interpretation: A Global, Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible*. Edited by Michael J Gorman 2017, esp. 274–77. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

<sup>3</sup> Craig S Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols). (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–15).

<sup>4</sup> Craig S Keener, Pentecost, Prophecy, and Proclamation to All Peoples. *The A.M.E. Zion Quarterly Review* 108 (1 January 1996): 43–66; *The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts: Rebirth and Prophetic Empowerment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997): 190–213; *Gift & Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001): 52–57; 'Pentecost,' 360–61 in *Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible* (ed. Donald E Gowan; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2003); Spirit, Holy Spirit, Advocate, Breath, Wind, 484–96 in *Westminster Theological Wordbook*; 'Power of Pentecost: Luke's Missiology in Acts 1–2,' *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12 (1 Jan. 2009): 47–73; Luke's Pneumatology in Acts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 205–22 in *Contemporary Issues in Pneumatology: Festschrift in Honor of George M. Flattery* (ed. James E Richardson; Springfield, MO: Global University, 2009); Holy Spirit, 159–73 in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (ed. Gerald R McDermott; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); The Holy Spirit in the New Testament, 704–705 in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook* (ed. J Daniel Hays and J Scott Duvall. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011); *Spirit Hermeneutics*: 39–66.

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)

For our purposes, however, some of these points demand fuller treatment than others, and I will expand most on the first section.

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

Jesus's command to wait in Jerusalem (1:4) underlines the priority of Pentecost. The wording of 1:8 is more like a promise than a command; the verb translated 'you will receive' is a future middle indicative. The mission and promise are inseparable, one cannot complete the mission without the empowerment. So vital to the mission is the power of the Spirit that they dare not even commence the mission without it: they must stay in Jerusalem to wait for what the Father promised (1:4). Awareness of their own inadequacy does not disqualify followers of Christ from their mission; the mission is empowered by God's strength, not by their own.

### a. Baptised in the Spirit

Jesus announces in Acts 1:5 that his disciples will be baptised in the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to be baptised in the Holy Spirit? This question has become a matter of great debate today. Many Christians believe that this happens at conversion (e.g. most Reformed Christians except the Puritan Sealers and the Keswick movement; most Baptists). Many other Christians associate it with an experience that can happen after conversion (e.g. Holiness and Pentecostal Christians).<sup>5</sup>

Cultural background does not necessarily settle this issue; those who envision the experience being after conversion note that early Jewish baptisms normally involved immersion; those who associate it with conversion note that when Jewish people-initiated gentiles they baptised them, making their baptism an act of conversion.

Most relevant for Luke-Acts, the phrase goes back to John the Baptist, who was probably not dividing the promise of the Spirit into separate elements. He envisioned fire for the wicked and the Spirit for the righteous (Luke 3:16),<sup>6</sup> but was thinking of the entire eschatological sphere of the Spirit's promised work. The Spirit

<sup>5</sup> For a survey of views, see Henry I Lederle, *Treasures Old and New: Interpretations of 'Spirit-Baptism' in the Charismatic Renewal Movement* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> That the fire is for the wicked seems clear from the context; see Luke 3:9, 17.

would both make God's people new (Ezek 36:25–27) and empower them like prophets (Joel 2:28–29).

Some New Testament writers emphasise one aspect of the Spirit's work and some the other; many emphasise both. Maybe then both groups of interpreters are correct: we are initiated into the Spirit's work at conversion, but might experience some aspects of the Spirit's work subsequently. Luke may apply the language of 'receiving the Spirit' more to empowerment than to conversion (cf. Acts 8:12, 14–17),<sup>7</sup> although he seems to expect these experiences to often overlap (2:38; 10:44–46).

In this context, Luke emphasises especially prophetic empowerment to speak for God (Acts 1:8; 2:4, 17–18), although he clearly recognises the Spirit's work more widely (Luke 3:16; Acts 2:38–39). This may be why Luke also depicts some experiences with the Spirit subsequent to conversion (e.g. Acts 8:14–17), sometimes even in the context of ministry among those who have already clearly experienced the Spirit in other ways (e.g. 4:8, 31; 13:9). That is, Luke is interested not specifically in 'first' or 'second' experiences, but in any experiences that serve the purpose of spreading the Gospel.<sup>8</sup>

The disparate New Testament evidence often leads different interpreters to different conclusions, and some will also demur from my tentative conclusion that both these schools of interpretation are more correct in what they affirm than in what they deny. In any case, nearly all Christians agree that everyone receives the Spirit in some sense when they become a follower of Jesus Christ, *and* that we can have subsequent experiences with the Spirit. So semantic debates aside (cf. 1 Tim 6:4; 2 Tim 2:14), the practical invitation remains the same: let us embrace all that the Spirit has for us!

## **b. Foretaste of the future**

Both in the biblical prophets and in Jesus's message to the disciples here, the promise of Spirit is eschatological. Jesus has been talking about the kingdom (1:3), and talk about the Spirit (1:4–5) also implied the era of the kingdom, since the prophets had repeatedly associated the outpouring of the Spirit with the end-time restoration of Israel (Isa 32:15; 44:3; 59:21; 61:1; Ezek 36:26–27; 37:1–14; 39:29; Joel 2:28–29; 3:1;<sup>9</sup> Zech 12:10).

Jesus's disciples thus ask the obvious question: 'Is this the time that you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?' (1:6). Jesus answers that the consummation of the kingdom will come (1:7), but the Spirit is given now to empower witnesses to prepare for the kingdom (1:8).

<sup>7</sup> Pauline scholars often conform Luke's use of this language to Paul's, but a majority of Acts commentators recognise that the Samaritans were already converted when they 'receive the Spirit' in Acts 8.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. evangelical scholar DA Carson: 'Although I find no biblical support for a second-blessing theology, I do find support for a second-, third-, fourth-, or fifth-blessing theology' (*Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987], 160).

The eschatological character of the Spirit, however, should provoke us to embrace the radical nature of the empowerment God has given us. The Spirit is first fruits (Rom 8:23) and down payment (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:13–14) of our future inheritance, the foretaste of the coming world (1 Cor 2:9–10; cf. Heb 6:4–5). Those who experience the powers of the age to come ought to display the life of the future age; the world should envision a foretaste of the kingdom through the way believers treat one another.

### c. Prophetic power

If we wonder what aspect of the Spirit's work the context emphasises, it is clear that it is empowerment to speak for Christ (1:8; cf. 4:8, 31; 5:32), inspired to speak for him prophetically (2:17–18). The Old Testament often (and most segments of early Judaism usually) associated the Spirit with prophetic empowerment. This association is dominant in Luke-Acts (Luke 1:15–17, 41–42, 67; 2:26; Acts 1:16; 4:25; 19:6; 20:23; 21:4, 11; 28:25) and explicit in this context (2:17–18). Jesus's disciples would hear Jesus's promise as if he were saying to them, 'The same Spirit who spoke through the prophets will speak through you' (cf. 1 Pet 1:11–12; 4:14; Rev 19:10).

Although especially expressed in speaking, this empowerment may also be expressed in other prophetic-type activity. Not exclusively, but most often, Luke associates 'power' with healing and exorcism (Luke 4:36; 5:17; 6:19; 8:46; 9:1; Acts 3:12; 4:7; 6:8), even when summarising much of Jesus's ministry (Acts 10:38). Indeed, the very word usually translated 'miracles' in Luke-Acts is simply the plural of the term typically translated 'power' (Luke 10:13; 19:37; Acts 2:22; 8:13; 19:11).<sup>10</sup> The purpose of signs, of course, is to draw attention not to themselves but to that which they attest, in this case, to the message about the kingdom (see esp. Acts 4:29–30; 14:3).<sup>11</sup>

The following context (Acts 1:9–11) remains consistent with this theme. Jesus's ascension would remind those familiar with the Old Testament first of the most conspicuous and clear prior biblical ascension: that of Elijah. When Elijah ascended to heaven, his disciple Elisha received a double portion (the inheritance right of a firstborn son) of his spirit. This analogy again reminds us that Jesus imparts the same Spirit who empowered the prophets.

### d. Witnesses (1:8)

The expression 'witnesses to ... the ends of the earth' reflects Isaiah. The parallel passage in Luke 24:44–48 emphasises that this commission is grounded in Scripture (24:44–46). In Isaiah, the

<sup>10</sup> Cf. discussion in my article, 'Miracles,' 2:101–7 in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Bible and Theology* (2 vols.; ed. Samuel E. Balentine; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Discussion in Keener, *Acts*, 1:537–49; on the credibility of miracles, see 1:320–82; *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); 'A Reassessment of Hume's Case Against Miracles in Light of Testimony from the Majority World Today,' *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 38 (3, Fall 2011): 289–310; 'Miracle Reports: Perspectives, Analogies, Explanations,' pp. 53–65 in *Hermeneutik der frühchristlichen Wundererzählungen: Historische, literarische und Rezeptionsästhetische Aspekte* (ed. Bernd Kollmann and Ruben Zimmermann; WUNT 339; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); 'Miracle Reports and the Argument from Analogy,' *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 25 (4, 2015): 475–95; 'The Dead are Raised' (Matthew 11:5/Luke 7:22): Resuscitation Accounts in the Gospels and Eyewitness Testimony, *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 25 (1, 2015): 55–79; 'Miracles,' pages 443–49 in *Dictionary of Christianity and Science* (ed. Paul Copan et al.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017).

Spirit appears in passages that speak of being ‘witnesses’ for YHWH (Isa 43:10; 44:3, 8), but here the disciples become witnesses for *Jesus* (Acts 1:8). Peter’s sermon will also soon imply Jesus’s deity (Acts 2:21, 38). Jesus seems to have been more explicit with his disciples about this reality after his resurrection (Matt 28:18–20; cf. John 20:22 in light of Gen 2:7), but it also makes sense of Jesus pouring out or baptising in the Spirit (Luke 3:16; Acts 2:33), since this activity was an exclusively divine prerogative (Joel 2:28–29).

Like the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20, the commission here is relevant not only to the first disciples, but to all the church subsequently. Clearly, we cannot do all that the first apostles did; their direct knowledge of Jesus’s ministry is foundational for the rest of us (Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31). Nor is each of us gifted in precisely the same ways, so we are not each called to duplicate all that the first apostles did. But the same mission continues to be the church’s mission.

How do we know this? Although the ‘witnesses’ are in the first case the Eleven and those who were with them (Luke 24:33), it also applies to Paul (18:5; 20:21; 23:11; 26:16, 22; 28:23) and Stephen (22:20). As is evident below, the mission to the ends of the earth is not completely fulfilled in the first apostolic generation; Acts is open-ended, revealing that the mission should continue along the pattern established in Acts. Although Luke’s biographically-oriented historical monograph focuses on key, parallel figures, he is aware that other believers also spread the message (e.g. 8:4; 11:19–20).

Most obviously and importantly, the same Spirit that once empowered the first apostles continues to be given to all believers (2:38–39). Given Luke’s emphatic association of the Spirit with speaking for God (1:8; 2:17–18), this means that all believers carry on the mission at some level, speaking for Christ in the spheres that God gives us. That even the hated Samaritans and Roman officers could receive the Spirit (8:15–17; 10:44–47) means that mission was never meant to be limited to Jerusalem by a hierarchical arrangement. Far from being paternalistic, mission was always meant to be partnership. While the Jerusalem apostles had essential teaching about Jesus to impart, all those who share the Spirit ultimately share in the mission.

## e. Ends of the earth

‘Ends of the earth’ echoes Isaianic language, most clearly Isaiah 49:6, a passage echoed about Jesus in Luke 2:32 and quoted explicitly by Paul for his own mission in Acts 13:47.<sup>12</sup> Again, the

<sup>12</sup> For Isaianic echoes, see further David W Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (WUNT 2.130; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

mission is not limited to the Eleven and those who were with them on that first occasion.

Sometimes, writers would provide an outline for what would follow in their book. Although many other outlines can be helpful, more detailed and more symmetrical, Acts 1:8 does offer a very rough sort of outline for what Acts will address: Jerusalem (Acts 1–7), Judea and Samaria (8–9), and the ends of the earth (10–28).

It is no coincidence that Luke's gospel begins and ends with the Temple in Jerusalem, but Acts moves from Jerusalem to Rome. In theological terms, this geography moves from heritage to mission: while remaining grounded in the salvation historical story of ancient Israel and Jesus, the mission continues to cross new barriers. The Spirit frequently moves believers in Acts, often across their comfort zones, in reaching and accommodating new cultural groups (Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2, 4; 15:28; 16:6–7).

But where are the 'ends of the earth'? Urban residents of the Roman empire could have envisioned Spain and the 'River' Ocean to the west; Parthia, India, China to the east; Scythia, Germany, Britain to the north; and, as often in ancient literature, Africa south of Egypt to the south. Rome had trade ties as far south as Tanzania, where a bust of Caesar has been recovered.

The Greek language used the term *Aithiopia*, or Ethiopia, for all of Africa south of Egypt, a region that Greeks had often depicted as the southern ends of the earth. This included most often the Nubian kingdom of Meroe, whose queen mother was often labelled the *kandake* (Candace, 8:27). Although the African court official in Acts 8 is perhaps more 'Jewish' than Cornelius in Acts 10 (contrast Acts 8:28 with 10:25), he is not a full convert. Although it was possible to use the Greek term *eunouchos* ('eunuch') more broadly, its normal meaning is clear, and Luke uses it five times in this passage (8:27, 34, 36, 38–39). Moreover, various kingdoms required male officials of queens (8:27) to be castrated. Under the law, one who was castrated could not become a full member of Israel (Deut 23:1), but God had promised a time when he would welcome foreigners and eunuchs (Isa 56:3–7), welcoming them in his house (56:7; cf. Luke 19:46).<sup>13</sup>

Already in 8:26–40, then, the good news is beginning to reach the ends of the earth in a proleptic way, with the conversion of the first gentile Christian, an African. The same is true for the multicultural Jewish crowd in 2:5–11, and when the good news reaches Rome, the heart of the empire in which Luke's audience lives (28:14–31). But each of these is merely proleptic, a foreshadowing of the good news ultimately reaching all nations (Luke 24:47). Acts is open-ended, inviting, indeed summoning, us

<sup>13</sup> For Acts 8:26–40, see further Keener, *Acts*, 2:1534–96; 'Novels' 'Exotic' Places and Luke's African Official (Acts 8:27),' *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 46 (1, 2008):5–20.

to participate in the story of mission that Luke has begun to narrate.

### 3. Preparation for Pentecost (1:12-26)

My remarks on these paragraphs will remain concise, despite their role in Luke-Acts as a whole. Disciples prepare for Pentecost in two ways. First, they reestablish the leadership structure that Jesus had ordained for them, namely, twelve for the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Luke 6:13; 22:30). The scandalous failure of one disciple disqualifies himself, but not God's larger plan for his people. In faith that God will empower the Twelve for their mission, they prepare.

More relevant to our current discussion, they remain together in united prayer, an idea that may frame much of this section (1:14; cf. 2:1). Prayer is a significant theme both in Luke's gospel (1:10; 3:21; 5:16; 6:12, 28; 9:18, 28–29; 11:1–2; 18:1, 10–11; 19:46; 21:36; 22:40–46) and in Acts (1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 6:4, 6; 8:22, 24; 9:11; 10:9, 30–31; 11:5; 12:5, 12; 16:13, 16, 25; 21:5; 22:17).<sup>14</sup>

Most relevant among such passages are those that speak of prayer before the coming of the Spirit. Thus, the Spirit comes on Jesus while he is praying (a detail noted only by Luke, in 3:21–22). Those who pray for empowerment in Acts 4:29–30 are filled in 4:31. Peter and John pray for the Samaritans to receive the Spirit (8:15). In less direct ways, prayer also precedes the Spirit's activity in some other passages (cf. 9:11, 17; 10:30, 44; 13:2–4). This connection fits Jesus's promise that those who ask for the Spirit will not be turned away (Luke 11:13).

What strikes me as the most important spiritual insight that I learned from working on the Acts commentary, although it is not an uncommon one, is the promise of the Spirit when we pray. In the final stages of my Acts commentary, I felt this point highlighted for me in a dream that I had while teaching in Indonesia. Because of this, I continue to pray for other outpourings of the Spirit among us today. Throughout modern history, revivals have usually flourished especially among the broken and the humble, those most desperate for God. He is nearest those who know their own need (cf. Luke 1:52; 10:15; 14:11; 18:14).

### 4. The *Proofs* of Pentecost (2:2-4)

Pentecost was a major pilgrimage festival that drew many Jewish pilgrims from around the world. It thus provided a strategic place

<sup>14</sup> See further e.g. Allison A. Trites, 'The Prayer Motif in Luke-Acts,' pp. 168–86 in *Perspectives on Luke-Acts* (ed. Charles H. Talbert; Danville, Va.: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978); Steven F. Plymale, *The Prayer Texts of Luke-Acts* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991); Kyu Sam Han, 'Theology of Prayer in the Gospel of Luke,' *JETS* 43 (4, 2000):675–93; Michael Green, *Thirty Years That Changed the World: The Book of Acts for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 268–73; Ignatius Jesudasan, 'Prayer in the Acts of the Apostles,' *JDharm* 28 (4, 2003):543–48.



to introduce the new message to a diverse gathering of God-fearing people. God drew attention to, and demonstrated the character of, this outpouring of the Spirit through three signs in particular.

The first sign, wind (2:2), evokes biblical theophanies; stormlike phenomena often accompanied God's public revelations (e.g. Exod 19:16; 20:18). The wind might recall most dramatically the activity of God's Spirit in Ezekiel 37, bringing end-time resurrection life. The second sign, the fire (2:3), likewise can evoke biblical theophanies and eschatological judgment (cf. Luke 3:9, 17), and thus also reveals an inbreaking of God's promised future.

Of the three signs, however, the third, worship in tongues (2:4), is most significant of the three for Luke. This becomes evident because it is repeated at initial outpourings in 10:46 and 19:6, and it provides the catalyst for the multicultural audience in 2:5–12 to hear Peter's explanation (2:16: 'This is what Joel meant'), which leads into his message that the promised era of salvation and restoration have come (2:21).

This third sign is not arbitrary, but relates directly to Acts' theme in 1:8.<sup>15</sup> As Spirit-inspired speech it fulfils the promise of prophetic empowerment to speak for God (2:17–18). But it is not merely *any* form of prophetic speech, but the sort that relates to Spirit-empowered witness in 1:8. What greater sign could God provide that he was sending his people to speak for him across all cultural barriers than by empowering them to worship him in other peoples' languages?

This is not a new insight,<sup>16</sup> but it is often a forgotten one. Late nineteenth-century radical evangelicals emphasised holiness, missions, and healing, and many of them sought an experience that they called 'baptism in the Spirit'. Believing that the need to learn hundreds of unreached peoples' languages was slowing global mission down, many also began praying for 'missionary tongues'.

This was the context into which earliest pentecostalism was birthed.<sup>17</sup> Early Pentecostals sought baptism in the Spirit and 'missionary tongues'; they recognised the connection between Luke's emphasis on the Spirit and his emphasis on empowerment for mission (1:8). After they experienced tongues, many left for foreign countries to try out their 'missionary tongues', and with a few notable exceptions, most were cruelly disappointed. Within a year or two after Azusa Street, most came to understand tongues in the Pauline sense, as valuable for prayer (1 Cor 14:2, 14–15), yet abandoned a direct connection with missions.

**15** Cf. Craig S Keener, 'Why does Luke use Tongues as a Sign of the Spirit's Empowerment?' *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 15 (2, 2007):177-84; 'Tongues as Evidence of the Character of the Spirit's Empowerment in Acts,' pp. 227-38 in *A Light to the Nations: Explorations in Ecumenism, Missions, and Pentecostalism* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2017).

**16** Cf. e.g. Chrysostom *Hom. Cor.* 35.1; Leo the Great *Sermon* 75.2; Bede *Comm. Acts* 2.3A; in the twentieth century, e.g. JW Packer, *Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 27: 'the gift of tongues (*glossolalia*) was symbolic of the world-wide work they were to do (1:8).'

**17** See further Gary B McGee, 'Shortcut to Language Preparation? Radical Evangelicals, Missions, and the Gift of Tongues,' *IBMR* 25 (July 2001):118-23.

They were surely right to dismiss any common use of missionary tongues. Nevertheless, I believe that they were *right* about the connection between tongues and mission, a connection perhaps implicitly revealed in global pentecostalism's success in evangelism (sometimes much faster than teaching can keep up with).

Luke emphasises the power of the Spirit to speak for God across cultural barriers. Tongues then is not an *arbitrary* sign. What greater sign could God give for this than to enable his servants to worship in other people's languages? Tongues provides 'evidence' of this empowerment—not necessarily of every individual who experiences the Spirit's power (a matter of debate even among Pentecostal scholars), but of what the experience was *about*: power for cross-cultural witness.

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

Luke mentions the presence of diaspora Jews 'from every nation under heaven' (2:5). Their response foreshadows mission to nations (1:8), just as does the African from the southern 'ends of the earth' (8:26–40) or Paul's mission in Rome (28:16–31).

Most scholars find in this section also an allusion to the narrative of Babel. Luke's list of nations (2:9-11) naturally evokes for his biblically literate ideal audience Scripture's first list of nations, Genesis 10. In the narrative that follows that first list, God descends to scatter humanity's languages (Gen 11:1–9). Here God scatters languages to bring instead a new cross-cultural *unity* in the Spirit.

Early pentecostalism was birthed in a time of global outpourings especially among the lowly, such as the Welsh revival, which began especially among mineworkers, and the revival at Pandita Ramabai's home for orphan brides in India. God soon raised up other, less often noted revivals in Africa and Indonesia.<sup>18</sup>

The Azusa Street Mission, led by African-American Holiness preacher William Seymour, was where the fledgling Pentecostal movement went global. From close to the start, various ethnic groups were represented, not surprising in multicultural Los Angeles. Some racist whites repented of racism and began ministering interracially. One witness, Frank Bartleman, celebrated that, 'The color line was washed away by the blood.'

Unfortunately, this transformation proved temporary, partly because racist Jim Crow laws in the U.S. South led to interracial meetings being violently disrupted. It may have also, however,

<sup>18</sup> For such wider contexts, see e.g. Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

been partly because many whites in the U.S., accustomed to belonging to the dominant culture, joined the movement without renouncing their racism.

William Seymour's mentor on the matter of tongues was Holiness preacher Charles Parham, and Seymour invited Parham to provide some counsel for some irregularities in the meetings at Azusa Street. Parham, however, whose background was Quaker, expected the Spirit to move in quiet ways, whereas Azusa Street was sometimes noisy, following much African-American religious tradition (not to mention some of the exuberant worship in the psalms). Feeling the prayer meetings out of order, Parham tried to take over, prompting a rupture between him and Seymour. Parham went on to denounce the meetings and to denigrate them as characteristic of African-American religion (using more racist language than that).

In response to these and other experiences with racially insensitive whites, Seymour's understanding of baptism in the Spirit evolved. Although he still valued worship in tongues, he emphasised, with John Wesley, that the greatest sign of the Spirit is love. One who cannot love one's brother or sister across racial, ethnic, or cultural lines has no legitimate claim to be an agent of the Spirit. Seymour's new emphasis is compatible with a key feature of Acts 2: the Spirit's power is about breaking down cultural barriers to build one new body in Christ.<sup>19</sup>

**19** On the Azusa Street Revival, see further esp. Cecil M Robeck, Jr. *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006).

## 6. The Prophecy of Pentecost (2:17-21)

Because the disciples' worship in languages they did not know (2:4) fulfilled Joel's prophecy about prophetic empowerment (2:16–18), it also provided a catalyst for Peter's message.

When the crowds heard this sound (2:6), they asked, 'What does this [Gr. *touto*] praise in many languages mean?' (2:11–12). 'This [*touto*] fulfils what Joel said' (2:16), Peter answered. He then goes on to mostly quote, but partly paraphrase, Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of the Spirit. He changes some wording: Joel's 'afterward' becomes 'in the last days', highlighting the eschatological element in Joel's context (Joel 3:1).

After quoting what Joel says about sons and daughters prophesying, and old and young having dreams and visions, Peter adds a further line to reinforce Joel's point: 'and they will prophesy' (the final line of Acts 2:18). He also transforms Joel's 'male and female servants' (Joel 2:29) into *God's* male and female servants (Acts 2:18), because the Spirit now makes all God's people

his agents like his servants the prophets in the Old Testament. To Joel's wonders in heaven and on earth Peter adds 'signs' (2:19), evoking not only signs such as those recounted in this context in 2:2–3 (cf. also Luke 23:45), but more explicitly Jesus's signs and wonders on earth, to which Peter will soon turn (Acts 2:22; cf. 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 14:3; 15:12).

What Peter retains also teaches us about Luke's pneumatology, just as in the programmatic statement of Jesus's mission from Isaiah in Luke 4:18–19. This empowerment to speak for God emphatically belongs to both genders: sons and daughters in 2:17 and God's male and female servants in 2:18.<sup>20</sup> It belongs to the young and old alike in 2:17. Luke has examples of such pairings for prophecies: the male Simeon and female Anna in Luke 2:25–27 and 36–38, and the very young daughters of Philip alongside the older Agabus in Acts 21:9–11.

Most central for Luke's own theme, however, and undoubtedly unrecognised by Peter himself, is the significance of 'all flesh' (2:17). This promise would be for all believers, including those who were far off (2:39), language that might evoke for Luke's audience Isaiah 57:19, language that some early Christians applied to gentiles (Eph 2:13, 17).

## 7. The Preaching of Pentecost (2:22–40)

Peter is able to show that, because the promised, last-days outpouring of the Spirit has begun, the era of salvation, of the deliverance of God's people, has also come. 'Whoever calls on the Lord's name will be saved' (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21). (This connection challenges the consistency of those who want to affirm that salvation is presently available but that prophetic expressions of the Spirit's work are not.)

But Joel goes on to speak of the survivors whom the Lord calls (Joel 2:32), a point to which Peter turns only at the end of his message ('to as many as the Lord our God may call,' Acts 2:39). Between these two snippets from Joel, Peter is explaining, in good Jewish midrashic fashion, the last line that he has quoted. What *is* the Lord's name on which they are to call for salvation?

In the Hebrew text of Joel, the Lord's name is YHWH, but Peter, with an improved understanding of Jesus's divine identity (cf. Acts 1:8), applies it to Jesus in 2:38: people call on the divine Lord's name by being baptised in Jesus's name (cf. Rom 10:9, 13). How does Peter argue for this conclusion?

<sup>20</sup> Appealing to Acts, many Pentecostals (as well as others; see e.g. Janice Capel Anderson, 'Reading Tabitha: A Feminist Reception History,' pp. 22–48 in *The Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles* [ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004]) have supported the ministries of women (cf. e.g. Estrela Alexander and Amos Yong, (eds), *Philip's Daughters: Women in Pentecostal-Charismatic Leadership* [Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2009]), in my opinion (for whatever it might be worth) rightly; in early pentecostalism, see Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001):158–65 (but for countervailing cultural and traditional tendencies, 165–76).

He appeals to the direct witness of himself and his apostolic peers that Jesus is the risen one (Acts 2:32), and the effects of Jesus's exaltation, the promised prophetic Spirit, of which Peter's audience themselves are witnesses (2:33). Jesus's role as the risen one also makes him the means of others' salvation. Linking together texts as synagogue expositors often did, Peter explains from Scripture that the risen one is beside God (Ps 16:8–11 in Acts 2:25–28), and that the one beside God is the Lord (Ps 110:1 in Acts 2:34; cf. Luke 20:42; 22:69).

Therefore, he can conclude, calling on the divine Lord's name is concretely fulfilled by repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (2:38). Despite Peter's explanation, such baptism would be a radical act for Jewish people. In addition to regular ritual washings, Judeans often used a once-for-all, repentance kind of washing for gentiles who wished to join the Jewish people. Males would be circumcised, but both men and women had to be purified from their former gentile impurities. Treating Jewish people like gentiles put everyone on the same footing: no matter how godly our heritage, all of us must come to God on the same terms, through Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> John the Baptist, who had also baptised Judeans as if they were gentiles, had warned that God could raise up children for Abraham even from stones (Luke 3:8; cf. 19:40; Matt 3:9).

In view of one erroneous teaching that arose in some Pentecostal circles (but is repudiated by other Pentecostals), it is helpful here to note that baptism in the name of Jesus has nothing to do with a formula recited over someone during baptism. Luke attaches 'in the name of Jesus' to baptising only with passive voice (Acts 2:38; 8:12, 16; 10:48; 19:5), never with the active voice (contrast 8:38). Baptism in Jesus's name has to do not with a baptiser's formula but with the recipient calling on Jesus's name (2:21; 22:16).

## 8. The Purpose of Pentecost (2:41–47)

The ultimate objective of cross-cultural, Spirit-empowered evangelism is the multicultural, Spirit-empowered church.

The structure of the passage shows that, as valuable as Peter's mass evangelism proved (2:41), the continuing witness of the church's lifestyle (2:42, 46) continued to bring in more converts (2:47).

Effective evangelism (2:41)

Shared worship, meals, and prayer (2:42)

Shared possessions (2:44–45)

Shared worship, meals, and prayer (2:46)

Effective evangelism (2:47)

The church's witness grew partly because conversions were followed by *discipleship*, as Jesus's disciples continued among the new believers the patterns of prayer and teaching that they had learned from Jesus. People participated in prayer and apostolic teaching (we can access much of their teaching today through studying the Gospels). (The apostles also continued Jesus's model of signs; 2:43; 3:1–2.)

Their 'fellowship' (2:42) including sharing of meals in homes, was undoubtedly often across socioeconomic lines. In the ancient Mediterranean world, table fellowship established a binding covenant relationship between guest and host; any subsequent hostility between them would be regarded as a heinous breach of trust. (This was why religious Pharisees criticised Jesus for eating with sinners in Luke 5:30 and 15:2, and why religious Christians criticised Peter for eating with gentiles in Acts 11:2–3.)

Temples were public space, but the only temple in the Roman empire dedicated to the one true God lay in Jerusalem, so this was the one place where Christians could gather en masse (Acts 2:46). Nevertheless, even in Jerusalem, with its ancient megachurch, believers also met together from house to house, allowing face-to-face relationships. Due to space limitations, such house gatherings allowed people to know each other, and would allow room for all the members to share their gifts (cf. 1 Cor 14:26; Eph 4:12).

The passage addresses not only what we could call, in Pauline terms, the Spirit's gifts, but also the Spirit's fruit: people parted with possessions, valuing people more than property. At the heart of the chiasmic structure about the church's sharing in 2:41–47 is their sharing of possessions in 2:44–45.

This is not a legalistic requirement (Acts 5:4); it is the transforming power of the Spirit that invites us to value people more than possessions, as Christ does. The same fruit of revival appears at the next outpouring of the Spirit in 4:32–35, although different outpourings may reveal different expressions of the Spirit's work (cf. 13:52). Social ministry continues in Acts on a corporate, organised level (6:1–3) and even transgeographically (11:28–30).

In light of Luke's fuller theology, the focus on sharing possessions here is probably no coincidence (see e.g. Luke 6:20–21, 23–25; 12:33; 14:33).<sup>22</sup> When we truly experience a foretaste of the coming

<sup>22</sup> Cf. more fully Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (SBLDS 39; Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1977); *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

**23** I elaborate this theme more fully in Craig S Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016):153-55, 176-79.

**24** He will have heard that they proclaim a way of salvation (Acts 16:18), but whereas he addresses them as 'sirs' or 'lords' (*kurioi*; 16:30), they point him to the ultimate Lord (*kurios*), Jesus (16:31).

age by the Spirit, we gain an eternal perspective (Rom 13:11–13; 1 Cor 2:9–10; 2 Cor 4:16–18; 5:16–17; 1 Thess 5:5–8),<sup>23</sup> and live in this age as those who are investing in heavenly treasure (Luke 12:20–21, 33–34; 18:22).

Sharing possessions functions as one sign of repentance. When the crowds ask, 'What shall we do' (to be saved)? (Acts 2:37), they echo other questions in Luke-Acts. When John preaches repentance, the crowds ask, 'What shall we do?' (Luke 3:10), to which John replies, 'Let whoever has two shirts share one with the person who has none, and let whoever has food do likewise' (3:11). When a rich ruler asks Jesus, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?' (18:18), Jesus replies, 'Sell everything you have and divide it among the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me' (18:21).

When a Philippian jailer asks Paul and Silas how to be saved, they invite him to believe in the Lord Jesus to be saved (Acts 16:30–31).<sup>24</sup> How does such an invitation cohere with the other replies in Luke-Acts? The jailer responds by washing their wounds, receiving baptism, and feeding them (16:33–34), all actions that could have had severe repercussions for him if the authorities learned of this behaviour (cf. 16:23–24), including losing his job or worse. In his case, too, genuine faith produces action.

Sharing possessions was one sign that people really believed the truth about Christ. Genuine faith does not treat Jesus merely as a fire escape 'in case' Christianity might be true; genuine faith stakes our life on the truth of his claims, laying up our treasure in heaven because we trust in him. Genuine faith affects how we live.

## 9. Conclusion

In Acts 1–2, Luke provides a paradigm for mission. God empowers us with the Spirit to cross cultural barriers, proclaiming the good news about the risen Lord Jesus Christ. God also empowers us with the Spirit to worship him, and to form one new, multicultural community of worshippers committed to Christ and to one another.