

THE SPIRIT AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN ACTS 1–2

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Abstract: *In Acts, Luke closely connects the gift of the Spirit with cross-cultural mission. Luke underlines this connection particularly conspicuously in the opening two chapters of Acts. In Acts, believers sometimes corporately experience this prophetic-like empowerment after times of prayer, fitting the paradigm suggested in Luke 11:13. The first witnesses provide a model, but the mission to the ends of the earth continues today, inviting our continued dependence on the Holy Spirit. The promise of the Spirit is for all believers in all generations (Acts 2:39).*

Key words: *missiology, pneumatology, Lukan missiology, Lukan pneumatology, Acts 2, Acts 1–2, power of the Spirit, Pentecost, crosscultural mission, the Spirit and mission*

A crucial theme at the heart of the Book of Acts is the Spirit empowering believers for mission (Acts 1:8).¹ Most scholars recognize mission as a central theme in Acts,² and I have also commented on this theme elsewhere.³ Here, however, I

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¹ See, e.g., George Mangatt, “The Holy Spirit and the Apostolic Church,” *BiBh* 18.1 (1992): 34–54; Antony Edanad, “The Spirit and the Christian Community according to Acts of the Apostles,” *Jeer* 28.164 (1998): 98–108; Denzil R. Miller, *Empowered for Global Mission: A Missionary Look at the Book of Acts* (Springfield, MO: Life, 2005), 62, 69; David Chee Wai Cheum, “The Spirit and Mission in the Book of Acts,” *Journal of Asian Mission* 6.2 (2004): 3–12; Craig S. Keener, “Power of Pentecost: Luke’s Missiology in Acts 1–2,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12.1 (Jan. 2009): 47–73.

² See e.g., Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (London: SPCK, 1968), 316; Stephen G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* (SNTSMS 23; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Jacques Dupont, *The Salvation of the Gentiles: Essays on the Acts of the Apostles* (trans. John R. Keating; New York: Paulist, 1979), 11–33; Donald P. Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundation for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 255–79; George Mangatt, “Believing Community according to the Acts of the Apostles,” *BiBh* 16.3 (1990): 173–81; Naymond H. Keathley, *The Church’s Mission to the Gentiles: Acts of the Apostles, Epistles of Paul* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1999), 3–62; Wilfried Eckey, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Der Weg des Evangeliums von Jerusalem nach Rom* (2 vols.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2000), 598–600; Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 127–59; Pablo Richard, “The Pluralistic Experiences of the First Christian Communities according to the Acts of the Apostles,” *Word & Worship* 35.3 (2002): 192–206; Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts in Its Mediterranean Milieu* (NovTSup 107; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 161–73; Steve de Gruchy, “Mission in Acts 1–11: An Experiment in Bible Study,” *International Review of Mission* 94 (373, 2005): 228–34; David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 79–83.

³ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2015), 1:437–41, 505–17.

focus on the role of the Spirit in Christian mission, especially as outlined in Acts 1–2.⁴

After noting the same idea elsewhere in Jesus's teaching in the Gospels, I will survey the need for and nature of the promise of the Spirit implied in Acts 1:4–5; the character of the Spirit's power in Acts 1:6–11 and 2:2–4 (including as a foretaste of the future, as empowering cross-cultural witness, and as God confirming the message). I will comment only briefly on preparation for Pentecost in 1:12–2:1, and then turn to the prophecy and preaching of Pentecost in 2:16–40; and, finally, the fruits of Pentecost in the earliest Christian community (2:41–47).

I. THE SPIRIT AND WITNESS IN THE GOSPELS

If one counts all possible references to the Spirit in Acts (59), these constitute nearly a quarter of NT references to the Spirit; no other NT book has even half as many.⁵ My focus in this article is on Acts, but I first want to illustrate that Luke is

⁴ In this article I adapt some material from my "Sent like Jesus: Johannine Missiology (Jn 20:21–22)," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12.1 (Jan. 2009): 21–46; see also my "Power of Pentecost"; idem, *Gift & Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); for fuller documentation, see the relevant passages in my *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); and especially relevant portions in my *Acts* commentary on Acts 1–2.

⁵ For emphasis on the Spirit in Acts, see, e.g., Roland Allen, *Pentecost and the World: The Revelation of the Holy Spirit in the "Acts of the Apostles"* (London: Oxford University Press, 1917); Heinrich von Baer, *Der Heilige Geist in den Lukasschriften* (BWANT 3; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1926); H. E. Dana, *The Holy Spirit in Acts* (2nd ed.; Kansas City, MO: Central Seminary Press, 1943); Pierre Bonnard, "L'Esprit Saint et l'Église selon le Nouveau Testament," *RHPR* 37 (1957): 81–90; G. W. H. Lampe, "The Holy Spirit in the Writings of St. Luke," in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot* (ed. D. E. Nineham; Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), 159–200; Étienne Trocmé, *L'Esprit-Saint et l'Église* (Paris: Fayard, 1969), 19–44; William Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 52–60; Kurt Stalder, "Der Heilige Geist in der lukanischen Ekklesiologie," *Una Sancta* 30 (1975): 287–93; Robert J. Karris, *What Are They Saying about Luke and Acts? A Theology of the Faithful God* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 105–17; François Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Thirty-Three Years of Research (1950–1983)* (trans. Ken McKinney; Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1987), 198–238; F. F. Bruce, "Luke's Presentation of the Spirit in Acts," *CTR* 5.1 (1990): 15–29; Joaquim das Carreira Neves, "História e Espírito Santo nos Actos dos apóstolos," *Did* 25.1–2 (1995): 195–234; Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (17th ed.; KEKNT 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 97–99; Robert E. Coleman, "The Dynamic of the Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Church," *STJ* 7.1–2 (1999): 27–35; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts," in *The Unity of Luke-Acts* (ed. Joseph Verheyden; BETL 142; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 165–83; Daniel Marguerat, *La première histoire du christianisme (les Actes des apôtres)* (LD 180; Paris: Cerf, 1999), 149–74; Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching Luke-Acts* (Saint Louis: Chalice, 2000), 71–87; Giancarlo Bruni, "Lo Spirito Santo nella letteratura lucana," in Giovanni Leonardi et al., *Le teologia narrativa di san Luca* (Credere oggi 119–20; Padua: Messaggero, 2000), 99–110; Eckey, *Apostelgeschichte*, 617–22; John Christopher Thomas, "The Charismatic Structure of Acts," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13.1 (2004): 19–30; Keith Warrington, *Discovering the Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 51–74; James M. Hamilton, "Rushing Wind and Organ Music: Toward Luke's Theology of the Spirit in Acts," *RTR* 65.1 (2006): 15–33; Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall, *Called to Be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 121–30; Gonzalo Haya-Prats, *Empowered Believers: The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts* (ed. Paul Elbert; trans. Scott A. Ellington; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011); Peterson, *Acts*, 60–65; Keener, *Acts*, 1:519–37; David J. McCollough, *Ritual Water, Ritual Spirit: An Analysis of the Timing, Mechanism, and Manifestation of Spirit-Reception in Luke-Acts* (Paternoster Biblical Monographs; Bletchley, Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2017).

not the only author to emphasize Jesus's teaching about the Spirit's empowerment for witness. Before the Lord ascended, he gave the Great Commission. In Matt 28:19–20, Jesus commissions the eleven disciples to make disciples of the nations.⁶

Some earlier Protestants were cessationists with regard to this passage: they believed that the commission was intended only for the first disciples. But in 28:20, Jesus promises to be with them until the end of the age. Since the promise extends to the end of the age, it seems logical to infer that the commission does as well.

Like Matthew, two other evangelists also associate Jesus's post-resurrection commission with a promise of divine presence. In John's Gospel, before Jesus goes to the cross, he promises that the Spirit will bear witness along with the disciples: in John 15:26–27, Jesus declares that the Spirit will testify about him, and his disciples will also testify. Jesus addresses here his first disciples, who, according to verse 27, have been with him "from the beginning" (cf. Acts 1:21–22).⁷

Yet these first disciples become a model for us as well,⁸ as is clear from Jesus's last discourse in this Gospel more generally. Thus, for example, in John 13:35 the world will know that we are Jesus's disciples by how we love one another, a command that 1 John shows us is meant for all of us (1 John 2:8, 10). Likewise, in John 17:21–23, the world will know that the Father sent Jesus because of our unity together as his followers.

The Spirit whom the first disciples received is the same Spirit who, Jesus promises in 14:17, 23, dwells in all his followers. In 1 John 2:27; 3:24; 4:13; 5:6, John speaks further about the same Spirit in all believers, whom he also continues to teach. In Rev 19:10, John explains that "the testimony about Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy."⁹ All who testify about Christ can depend on the joint testimony of God's Spirit.

The connection between the Spirit and witness recurs in the final commission in John's Gospel. In 20:21, Jesus commissions his disciples: "As the Father sent me, I send you." The way that the Father sent Jesus is of course special, in that he alone is fully divine as well as fully human, and only he could die for the sins of the world. But in other respects, Jesus's mission of revealing God's character and heart for the world is carried on by his followers, whom he in turn has sent (as in 17:18: "Just as you sent me into the world, so I also have sent them into the world"; cf. 13:20; 20:23).¹⁰

⁶ I elaborate on these themes in Keener, *Matthew*, 715–21; and esp. "Matthew's Missiology: Making Disciples of the Nations (Matt 28:19–20)," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12.1 (Jan. 2009): 3–20.

⁷ We could compare also Acts 5:32, where the apostles declare, "We are witnesses about these matters, and so also is the Holy Spirit."

⁸ Cf., e.g., Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 468 n. 22; cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁹ Cf. discussion in David Hill, "Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St. John," *NTS* 18 (1972): 414; Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 947–48; Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 452; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 677–78; Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation* (NCCS; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 269.

¹⁰ More detailed discussion in my "Sent like Jesus."

Jesus does not leave his followers without the power to carry on this astonishing commission. He breathes on the disciples, as God first breathed into Adam the breath of life (Gen 2:7),¹¹ and declares, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). The breath evokes the “wind” of the Spirit in 3:8, which is part of the context about being born from the Spirit (3:3–8).¹² All who have been born from the Spirit have also received the Spirit in this way.

Jesus has already promised that the Spirit will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8–11), just as Jesus himself has done earlier in this Gospel (3:18–20; 8:46; 15:22).¹³ The Spirit thus continues Jesus’s ministry to the world. In this context, however, he does so especially through believers. In 16:7, Jesus does not promise to send the Spirit to the world to convict them; rather, he sends the Spirit to his disciples.¹⁴ In 16:13 (cf. 15:15), the Spirit also continues to reveal Jesus’s person and presence to Jesus’s followers.¹⁵ We can reveal Jesus to the world because we know him.

II. THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT IN ACTS (1:4–5)

Of the four evangelists, however, it is Luke who elaborates most extensively on the connection between the Spirit and mission.¹⁶ The Spirit empowers and directs believers for cross-cultural mission in Acts. Note the following instances:

- In Acts 8:29, it is the Spirit who tells Philip to go up to the African official’s chariot, thus arranging for this official to receive the good news.
- In 10:19, it is the Spirit who tells Peter to meet the Gentile messengers of Cornelius.
- In 10:44–47 and 11:15–16, it is the Spirit falling on these Gentiles that confirms that God has welcomed them.
- In 13:2–4, it is the Holy Spirit who sends Barnabas and Saul out on their mission to evangelize even Gentiles.
- In 15:28, it is the Spirit who guides the Jerusalem church to welcome Gentiles despite their lack of circumcision.
- In 16:6–7, it is the Spirit who continues to guide Paul and Silas on their cross-cultural mission.
- In 28:25, it is the Spirit who inspired the Scripture by which Paul continues to justify the mission among Gentiles.

Luke elaborates concerning the Spirit and the mission at the strategic point at which Jesus passes on his mission to his followers: the closing of Luke’s Gospel

¹¹ With, e.g., Keener, *John*, 2:1204–5; Köstenberger, *John*, 575; Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 2005), 499; Johannes Beutler, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John* (trans. Michael Tait; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 511.

¹² See discussion in Keener, *John*, 1:537–58.

¹³ See discussion in Keener, *John*, 2:1030–35.

¹⁴ Keener, *John*, 2:1030; cf. Luther *Sermon on John 16*; Henry Efferin, “The Paraclete in John 14–16,” *Stulbs Theological Journal* 1.2 (1993): 149–56.

¹⁵ Keener, *John*, 2:1039.

¹⁶ On the Spirit and mission in Luke-Acts, see, e.g., my “Power of Pentecost.”

and the beginning of Luke's second volume, the Book of Acts. Transitions between volumes of a work were not always strategic—at the end of one book, for example, Josephus notes that he will pick up in the next book, apparently because he is running out of space in this one¹⁷—but sometimes they are deliberately designed. Sometimes, as in Acts, a new volume recapitulates the closing scene of the previous volume.¹⁸ And when Luke repeats a scene—such as his three accounts of Paul's call and conversion (Acts 9:3–16; 22:5–15; 26:12–18) or of Cornelius's conversion (Acts 10; 11:1–18; 15:7–9)—he invites us to take notice.

In the promises of Luke 24:47–49 and Acts 1:4–8, Jesus emphasizes the need to depend on God to fulfill the commission he is giving; the Spirit is both necessary and available. Jesus's hearers would have understood his promise as involving prophetic empowerment. The Spirit is also a gift, not something earned. Some Jewish teachers relegated the Spirit to at most a few who were worthy,¹⁹ but Luke-Acts repeatedly emphasizes that the Spirit is God's gracious "gift" (Luke 11:13; Acts 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17; 15:8). Just as believers must depend on God's gift for righteousness (1 Cor 6:11),²⁰ new ways of thinking (Rom 8:5–6),²¹ and moral transformation (Gal 5:22–23),²² our abilities for ministry come from God (1 Cor 12:7–11; 2 Tim 1:6–7). Human boasting is thus empty. God never expected the church to carry on Jesus's mission in our own strength; he provides us the power of his Spirit.

1. *Believers need the Holy Spirit for our mission.* In Luke-Acts, Jesus himself provides the ultimate example for depending on the Spirit. In his inaugural sermon in Luke's Gospel, he declares that the Spirit anointed him for his mission (Luke 4:18); narrating Jesus's mission, Peter likewise notes that the Father anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power, so that he healed and cast out demons (Acts 10:38). Jesus begins his public ministry only after the Spirit comes on him (Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14; Acts 10:38). If our Lord, who unlike us is God in the flesh (including in Luke's theology, see below), depended on the Spirit in his mission, how much more must we do so in ours.

¹⁷ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.320; cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Dem.* 58.

¹⁸ Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.1; Chariton, *Chaer.* 5.1.1–2; David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (LEC 8; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 90, 117, citing, e.g., Diodorus Siculus 1.42; 2.1.1–3; 3.1.1–3; 18.1.1–6; Daniel Marguerat, *Les Actes des apôtres (1–12)* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2007), 36.

¹⁹ Cf., e.g., m. Sotah 9:15; t. Sotah 13:3; Sifre Deut. 173.1.3; W. D. Davies, "Reflections on the Spirit in the Mekilta: A Suggestion," *JANESCU* 5 (1973): 98; Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (trans. Israel Abrahams; 2 vols.; 2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979), 1:577–78. By contrast, the Spirit is a gift in Wis 8:21; 9:17.

²⁰ Discussed further in Michael Horton, *Justification* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).

²¹ Discussed further in my *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016); idem, "Transformed Thinking in Paul's Letters," *Doon Theological Journal* 13.1–2 (2016): 5–24; idem, "Corrupted versus Renewed Minds in Romans 1, 7, and 12," in *Texts and Contexts: Gospels and Pauline Studies and Sermons in Honor of David E. Garland* (ed. Todd Still; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 97–104.

²² Discussed further in my "Comparison of the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 with Ancient Thought on Ethics and Emotion," in *The Language and Literature of the New Testament: Essays in Honor of Stanley E. Porter's 60th Birthday* (ed. Lois K. Fuller Dow, Craig A. Evans, and Andrew W. Pitts; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 574–98.

Thus Jesus commands his followers to wait in Jerusalem for divine empowerment before beginning their mission (1:4–5). Although theologically this gift includes and begins with conversion (Luke 3:16; Acts 2:38–39; 11:16–17), Luke focuses especially on the empowerment aspect of the Spirit’s work, as in his thesis statement in Acts 1:8: power for witness. Thus most Acts scholars believe that Luke at least on occasion speaks of people “receiving” the Spirit even after their conversion (e.g. Acts 8:15–17)²³—that is, subsequently experiencing this promised empowerment, however we articulate that experience now theologically.

Acts 8 seems an exception to the ideal pattern, but in that respect it is not alone. In Luke’s narratives, the sequence and signs of Spirit reception sometimes vary, suggesting that God is not bound to a set pattern (8:12–17; 10:44–48; 19:5–6). Indeed, believers involved in mission continue to receive special “fillings” for power as needed (e.g. 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9), and may be described as remaining “full” of the Spirit (6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24).

Luke speaks of the Spirit falling on people (Acts 10:44; 11:15), the Spirit coming on people (19:6), God pouring the Spirit out on them (2:17–18, 33; 10:45), people receiving the Spirit (2:38; 8:15–19; 10:47; 19:2; cf. 1:8), and people being filled with the Spirit (2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9, 52). Sometimes Christians from different denominations today divide over semantics, although Scripture warns us not to fight over words (2 Tim 2:14). However we describe these experiences in Acts, nearly all Christians agree that we receive the Spirit and full access to his work at conversion; yet nearly all Christians also agree that we can have other experiences with the Spirit that deeply affect us and help us. D. A. Carson wryly declares, “Although I find no biblical support for a second-blessing theology, I do find support for a second-, third-, fourth-, or fifth-blessing theology.” He declares that it is dangerous “to be satisfied with a merely creedal Christianity that is kosher but complacent, orthodox but ossified, sound but soundly asleep.”²⁴

Or one could say that we all do receive full access to the Spirit at conversion, but at special times we may recognize our need for the Spirit’s special help. Whatever the terminology with which various readers feel most comfortable, there

²³ See e.g., Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit: The Pentecostal Experience and the New Testament Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 177–80; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 346; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 302; Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 289; Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 348, 360–75; Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament Church and Today* (rev. ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 44–45; Max Turner, “The ‘Spirit of Prophecy’ as the Power of Israel’s Restoration and Witness,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 337–39; Youngmo Cho, *Spirit and Kingdom in the Writings of Luke and Paul: An Attempt to Reconcile These Concepts* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 146; fuller discussion in Keener, *Acts*, 2:1522–27.

²⁴ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 160, the first part quoted in my *Gift & Giver*, 167. Both lines are shared by Kevin DeYoung in a Sept. 20, 2012 post on the Gospel Coalition’s website.

seems little disagreement that Luke invites his audience to confess their dependence on God's Spirit.

2. *Prophet-like empowerment.* Scripture often associated the Spirit with prophecy or other divine revealing (e.g. Num 11:25–29; 1 Sam 19:20, 23; 2 Chr 15:1–2; 18:23; 20:14; Neh 9:30; Zech 7:12),²⁵ an association widely recognized by Jewish people in Jesus's day.²⁶ Luke repeatedly highlights this "prophetic" dimension of the Spirit, even from the start of his Gospel, from John in his mother's womb to Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, references to earlier biblical prophets, and finally the mission in Acts (Luke 1:15, 17, 41–42, 67; 2:25–27; 12:12; Acts 1:16; 4:25; 5:3, 9; 6:10; 7:51–52, 55; 13:2, 4, 9; 19:6; 20:23; 21:4, 11; 28:25). This emphasis is explicit in Acts 2:17–18, where Peter explains the gift of the Spirit as empowerment for all God's people to "prophesy" and hear from him.

Although in Acts we read of prophets and prophesying in a more specific sense, such as with Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:10) or Philip's four daughters (21:9), Luke's broader understanding of prophetic empowerment is relevant to all of us who testify for Christ, from Pentecostals to cessationists. In the OT, the "word of the Lord" typically meant the law or the messages announced by prophets (e.g. 1 Sam 15:10, 23, 26; 1 Kgs 12:24). Throughout Acts, the "word of the Lord" usually refers to the gospel (e.g. Acts 8:25; 12:24; 13:44, 49). As we share good news with people, we have a role that in some key respects resembles that of biblical prophets, and we can recognize that God's Spirit is working through us. If God empowered Elijah or Isaiah or Huldah to speak truth no matter what, God can do the same for us. Obviously I do not refer to writing Scripture but to the Spirit presenting Christ directly to people as we proclaim the already-true gospel of Christ.

III. THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT (ACTS 1:6–11)

In Acts 1–2, the Spirit's power is eschatological and prophetic. This power becomes especially vital when breaking new ground in reaching the unevangelized.

1. *Foretaste of the future.* Because Jesus has been speaking about the kingdom (1:3) and the Spirit (1:4–5), his disciples naturally expect the end time. After all, the

²⁵ Cf. Max-Alain Chevallier, *Ancien Testament, hellénisme et judaïsme, la tradition synoptique, l'oeuvre de Luc*, vol. 1 of *Souffle de Dieu: Le Saint-Esprit dans le Nouveau Testament* (Point théologique 26; Paris: Beauchesne, 1978), 27–29; Wonsuk Ma, *Until the Spirit Comes: The Spirit of God in the Book of Isaiah* (JSOTSup 271; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 30–32, 202–3, 206–7; Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 63–86; Craig S. Keener, "Spirit, Holy Spirit, Advocate, Breath, Wind," in *Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible* (ed. Donald E. Gowan; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 486–87.

²⁶ E.g., Sir 48:24; *Jub.* 31:12; 1QS VIII, 16; Philo, *Fug.* 186; Josephus, *Ant.* 6.166; LAB 28:6; 4 Ezra 14:22; t. Pisha 4:14; see further discussion in, e.g., Ernest Best, "The Use and Non-use of Pneuma by Josephus," *NovT* 3 (1959): 222–25; Marie E. Isaacs, *The Concept of Spirit: A Study of Pneuma in Hellenistic Judaism and Its Bearing on the New Testament* (London: Heythrop College Press, 1976), 47–48; Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 49–101; idem, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology with Special Reference to Luke-Acts* (JSNTSup 54; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 53–112; Turner, *Power*, 86–104; Craig S. Keener, *The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts: Divine Purity and Power* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), 10–13, 31–33.

same contexts in the OT prophets that spoke of God pouring out the Spirit also spoke of Israel's restoration (e.g. Isa 44:3; 59:21; Ezek 36:26–27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28–29). Thus the disciples ask the obvious question in Acts 1:6: is Jesus about to restore the kingdom?

In Acts 1:7–8, Jesus explains the “already/not-yet” aspect of the kingdom suggested earlier.²⁷ The Messiah has come yet will come again; he introduced his kingdom but it will be consummated only at his return; Jesus has risen but his followers' resurrection remains future. In 1:7–8, Jesus explains that it is not yet the time for Israel's physical restoration (cf. Acts 3:19–21), but the end-time mission of Spirit-empowered witness to the nations has come. Isaiah had already promised that God's Spirit would empower his people to testify for him to the nations, even “to the ends of the earth” (Isa 43:10–12; 44:3, 8; 49:6; cf. Acts 13:47). To experience the Spirit, then, is to experience a foretaste of the future kingdom (see, e.g., 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). This means that the world ought to be able to observe Christians' lives and message and recognize in that a foretaste of the coming age.

2. *Witnesses to the whole world.* Acts 1:1 describes Luke's Gospel as an account of all that Jesus *began* to do and teach; in Acts, we see how Jesus and his name continue to work through his church.²⁸ Acts 1 elaborates the transition that begins with Jesus's commission and ascension. Although the ancient world had many ascension stories, the one obviously shared between Luke and his ideal audience was the biblical account of Elijah.²⁹ In 2 Kgs 2:11, the miracle-working prophet Elijah ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire. When Elijah ascended, God empowered his successor, Elisha, with the same Spirit who had empowered Elijah (2 Kgs 2:9–10). Similarly, Acts 1:8–11 and 2:33 show us that after Jesus ascended, he empowered his church with the gift of the Spirit.

As in John's Gospel, the witnesses in Acts are in the first instance Jesus's original followers. The “witnesses” include both the eleven in Acts 1:2, 8 and the

²⁷ For this conception, see, e.g., Werner Georg Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament according to Its Major Witnesses—Jesus, Paul, John* (trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 149; Ladd, *Theology*, 322; Don N. Howell Jr., “Pauline Eschatological Dualism and its Resulting Tensions,” *TrinJ* 14.1 (Spring 1993): 3–24; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 466–72; N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 930.

²⁸ For this long-standing and common (though not unanimous) understanding of Acts 1:1, see, e.g., Chrysostom, *Hom. Act. 1*; F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 66 (regarding it as “emphatic”); E. M. Blaiklock, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 49; Bo Reicke, “The Risen Lord and His Church: The Theology of Acts,” *Int* 13 (1959): 156–69; Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 112, 120; Keener, *Acts*, 1:641, 645, esp. 651–52.

²⁹ With, e.g., Arie W. Zwiep, *The Ascension of the Messiah in Lukan Christology* (NovTSup 87; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 59–63, 194; Witherington, *Acts*, 112; Kenneth Duncan Litwak, *Echoes of Scripture in Luke-Acts: Telling the History of God's People Intertextually* (JSNTSup 282; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 149; I. Howard Marshall, “Acts,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 527.

others “with them” in Luke 24:33, 48,³⁰ those who knew the entire story of Jesus’s ministry (Acts 1:21–22). Their mission, however, becomes a model for the entire church, since in 1:8, the mission continues to the “ends of the earth.” That is why Acts 22:15, 18, 20; 23:11; and 26:16, 22, also call Stephen and Paul witnesses regarding what they have seen and heard. Likewise, in 2:38–39 the Spirit is promised to all believers in all generations and all locations. Acts 2:39 speaks of the “promise” of the Spirit (2:39) just as 1:4 did, and 2:38 speaks of “receiving” the same gift of which 1:8 speaks. The Lord empowers all believers to continue the same mission of witness, although this empowerment takes on different forms for different agents.

In 2:5–11, the Jews from all nations under heaven foreshadow the mission to the ends of the earth. Greeks considered “Ethiopia,” by which they meant all of Africa south of Egypt, the “ends of the earth,”³¹ so the first Gentile convert in 8:27–40 also foreshadows the mission to the ends of the earth. No one cognizant of the empire’s geography considered Rome the ends of the earth; it was instead the heart of its empire.

But Acts does not narrate the completion of the mission. Like previous foreshadowings, Paul’s ministry in Rome in Acts 28 also foreshadows the mission to the ends of the earth. Acts scholars often consider Acts’s conclusion to be open-ended, due to the continuing nature of the mission.³² Luke’s Gospel begins and ends in Jerusalem; Acts begins in Jerusalem but moves to Rome. Theologically, Luke-Acts moves from heritage to mission, from what God has already done to what he continues to do. Today, we might say that the Spirit thrusts us forward into cultural and cross-cultural engagement and mission for Jesus, while maintaining our grounding in what God has already done as revealed in Scripture.

First-century historians often wrote biographically, focusing on key characters. Nevertheless, ancient historians’ own writings frequently tell us that they wrote

³⁰ See Richard J. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word* (AnBib 82; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), 291.

³¹ See, e.g., Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 80; Clarice J. Martin, “A Chamberlain’s Journey and the Challenge of Interpretation for Liberation,” *Sem* 47 (1989): 116–19; F. Scott Spencer, *The Portrait of Philip in Acts: A Study of Role and Relations* (JSNTSup 67; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 151–52; Witherington, *Acts*, 290; Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 145; further discussion in Keener, *Acts*, 1:1534–35.

³² See discussion in Daniel Marguerat, “Et quand nous sommes entrés dans Rome: L’énigme de la fin du livre des Actes (28,16–31),” *RHPR* 73 (1993): 1–21; Daniel Marguerat, “The Enigma of the Silent Closing of Acts (28:16–31),” in *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke’s Narrative Claim upon Israel’s Legacy* (ed. David P. Moessner; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 304; Marguerat, *Histoire*, 333; James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 278. This suggests an invitation to carry on the mission; see Brian S. Rosner, “The Progress of the Word,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 232–33; John Moles, “Time and Space Travel in Luke-Acts,” in *Engaging Early Christian History: Reading Acts in the Second Century* (ed. Rubén R. Dupertuis and Todd Penner; Bristol, CT: Acumen, 2013), 117–18.

history as an *example* for what their readers should do or not do.³³ These first witnesses thus provide a model for the church's mission; usually their example is positive, and God's action in Acts is naturally always positive. Luke scholars thus find a pattern of parallels in Luke-Acts between Jesus, Peter (leading figure of the Jewish mission) and Paul (leading figure in the Gentile mission).³⁴ The pattern offers an example to follow: the church in our generation, too, must carry on the mission.

3. *God confirming his message.* Jesus promises "power" for the mission in 1:8 and in Luke 24:49 (which echoes Isa 32:15), we should hear this in the context of the normal sense of "power" in Luke-Acts. Although this sense seems surprising to modern Western readers, it can be verified with a simple concordance. Although not all passages in Luke-Acts associate power with healing and exorcism, this is the term's most common association there (cf. Rom 15:19):

- Luke 4:36: "with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits and they come out"
- Luke 5:17: "the Lord's power was *present* for him to heal"
- Luke 6:19: "everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him, for power was coming from him and healing them all"
- Luke 8:46: "Someone *did* touch me, for I perceived that power flowed out from me"
- Luke 9:1: "After he called the Twelve, he gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases"
- Acts 3:12: "Why does this surprise you, or why are you staring at us, as if by our own power or godliness we made this man able to walk?"
- Acts 4:7: "By what sort of power or in what kind of name have you done this thing?"
- Acts 6:8: "And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people."
- Acts 10:38: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, who went around performing good for people and healing whoever was oppressed by the devil, because God was with him."³⁵

Although false signs like those of Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:9–11 presumably continue today (cf. Exod 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18–19; Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22; Acts 13:6; 19:13; 2 Thess 2:9; Rev 13:13–14; 16:14),³⁶ evidence is abundant that God also

³³ See, e.g., Polybius 1.1.1; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 1.2.1; 1.6.3–5; Tacitus, *Agr.* 1; *Ann.* 3.65; cf. Valerius Maximus 2.pref.; Lucian, *Hist.* 59; Maximus of Tyre 22.5; Philo, *Abr.* 4; Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.204; 4 Macc 1:7–8; 1 Cor 10:11.

³⁴ See Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (SBLMS 20; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974); Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986–1990); Keener, *Acts*, 1:555–64; earlier but somewhat excessive, Michael D. Goulder, *Type and History in Acts* (London: SPCK, 1964).

³⁵ My own translations.

³⁶ Cf., e.g., accounts in R. Kenneth McAll, "Taste and See," in *Demon Possession: A Medical, Historical, Anthropological, and Theological Symposium* (ed. John Warwick Montgomery; Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1976), 269–78; Jaime Licauco, "Psychic Healing in the Philippines," in *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing, Held at the St. Sabina Center, San Rafael,*

continues to display his power in many circumstances of groundbreaking evangelism today. Christian philosopher J. P. Moreland points out that up to 70 percent of evangelical growth globally in recent decades is associated with signs and wonders.³⁷

For example, when Christians preach in completely Muslim villages in Mozambique, God often confirms the gospel by healing deafness and blindness. These healings so grip the attention of people in these villages that they pay closer attention to the gospel and many are converted. I have evangelical scholar friends who have witnessed such events there.³⁸ In one region of Mozambique once classified as Muslim, hundreds of deaf people have been healed and the region is now classified as predominantly Christian. A research team from the United States published medical documentation for some of these healings.³⁹

Sources from China suggest that, at least as of the last decades of the twentieth century, more than half of conversions in rural areas are due to healings.⁴⁰ Dr.

California, September 5–7, 1987 (ed. Ruth-Inge Heinze; n.p.; Independent Scholars of Asia; Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1988), 93–96.

³⁷ J. P. Moreland, *Kingdom Triangle: Recover the Christian Mind, Renovate the Soul, Restore the Spirit's Power* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 166–67; cf. examples in William R. Read, Victor M. Monterroso, and Harmon A. Johnson, *Latin American Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 323; Abraham T. Pothen, “Indigenous Cross-Cultural Missions in India and Their Contribution to Church Growth: With Special Emphasis on Pentecostal-Charismatic Missions” (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Mission, 1990), 189–90; Joseph 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. diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1999), 106–13; Luis Bush and Beverly Pegues, *The Move of the Holy Spirit in the 10/40 Window* (ed. Jane Rumph; Seattle: YWAM, 1999), 62–63; Douglass Paul Norwood, “A Reconciliation Colloquium for Church Leaders in Suriname” (D.Min. project, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2001), 24–26; Melba Padilla Maggay, “Early Protestant Missionary Efforts in the Philippines: Some Intercultural Issues,” in *Asian Church and God’s Mission: Studies Presented in the International Symposium on Asian Mission in Manila, January 2002* (ed. Wonsuk Ma and Julie C. Ma; Manila: OMF Literature, 2003), 34; Julie C. Ma, “A Close Encounter with the Transcendental: Proclamation and Manifestation in Pentecostal Worship in Asian Context,” in *Asian Church and God’s Mission*, 136; Chin Khua Khai, “The Assemblies of God and Pentecostalism in Myanmar,” in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia* (ed. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang; Regnum Studies in Mission, AJPSS 3; Oxford: Regnum, 2005), 268–70; Bård Løkken Knapstad, “Show Us the Power! A Study of the Influence of Miracles on the Conversion Process from Islam to Christianity in an Indonesian Context” (Th.M. thesis; Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology, 2005), 79–92; Hwa Yung, “The Integrity of Mission in the Light of the Gospel: Bearing the Witness of the Spirit,” *Mission Studies* 24 (2007): 173–75; Matthew Marostica, “Learning from the Master: Carlos Annacondia and the Standardization of Pentecostal Practices in and beyond Argentina,” in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing* (ed. Candy Gunther Brown; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 207. Earlier but particularly thoroughly, see Christiaan Rudolph De Wet, “Signs and Wonders in Church Growth” (M.A. thesis; Fuller Theological Seminary, 1981), 92.

³⁸ E.g., Brandon Walker, personal correspondence, May 27, 2016; Wendy J. Deichmann, “Lessons from Mozambique,” *Good News* (Jan. 2015): 20.

³⁹ Candy Gunther Brown, Stephen C. Mory, Rebecca Williams, and Michael J. McClymond, “Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Proximal Intercessory Prayer (STEPP) on Auditory and Visual Impairments in Rural Mozambique,” *Southern Medical Journal* 103.9 (Sept. 2010): 864–69; Candy Gunther Brown, *Testing Prayer: Science and Healing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 207–9, 214–20, 223–30.

⁴⁰ From estimates associated with the Three Self Church, see Claudia Währisch-Oblau, “God Can Make Us Healthy Through and Through: On Prayers for the Sick and the Interpretation of Healing Experiences in Christian Churches in China and African Immigrant Congregations in Germany,” *Interna-*

Bal Krishna Sharma in Nepal told me that 80 percent of Christian growth in Nepal is associated with healings.⁴¹ Guaranteeing exact percentages is an imprecise exercise, but we are talking about millions of people, even today, converted when God uses dramatic healings and exorcisms to get their attention for the gospel.⁴² The same has been true for much of history, whether, for example, in the church of the third and fourth centuries,⁴³ through various mission movements,⁴⁴ or in the early twentieth century Korean revival.⁴⁵

This is not to imply that Luke expects each believer to have this sort of ministry; he would presumably agree with Paul, who emphasizes the diversity of the body's gifts. Even in Acts, however, despite its focus on apostles, such signs are not limited to the ministries of apostles; note Stephen in 6:8 and Philip in 8:6. Miracles are meant to honor Jesus's name, not ours. Again, recall Peter's words in Acts 3:12: "Why does this surprise you, or why are you staring at us, as if by our own power or godliness we made this man able to walk?" Note similarly the protests of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:15 against worshiping them for healing another disabled man: "We are people of the same nature as you."

We cannot know what God will always do, but we can rightly expect that he knows how to honor the good news about his Son. As we share Christ with people, we may therefore pray for their needs when we have that opportunity, with confidence in his commitment to his gospel. God does not use all of us in the same ways, but Acts reminds us that God often chooses to attest the message of his grace in special ways.

tional Review of Mission 90.356–57 (2001): 87; for significantly higher figures associated with rural house churches, see Edmond Tang, "Yellers' and Healers: Pentecostalism and the Study of Grassroots Christianity in China," in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia* (ed. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang; Oxford: Regnum, 2005), 481. Cf. Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions: The Costly Revival* (London: Monarch, 1999), 112, 117.

⁴¹ Interview, Bangalore, India, Jan. 13, 2016.

⁴² See further discussion in my *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); idem, "Miracle Reports: Perspectives, Analogies, Explanations," in *Hermeneutik der frühchristlichen Wundererzählungen: Geschichtliche, literarische und rezeptionsorientierte Aspekte* (ed. Bernd Kollmann and Ruben Zimmermann; WUNT 339; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 53–65; idem, "The Dead are Raised" (Matthew 11:5//Luke 7:22): Resuscitation Accounts in the Gospels and Eyewitness Testimony," *BBR* 25 (2015): 55–79; idem, "Miracle Reports and the Argument from Analogy," *BBR* 25 (2015): 475–95; idem, "Miracles," in *Dictionary of Christianity and Science* (ed. Paul Copan et al.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 443–49.

⁴³ Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 40–41, 60–62; cf. James A. Kelhoffer, "Ordinary Christians as Miracle Workers in the New Testament and the Second and Third Century Christian Apologists," *BibRes* 44 (1999): 23–34.

⁴⁴ E.g., Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (vol. 1: to A.D. 1500) (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1975), 344; William Young, "Miracles in Church History," *Churchman* 102.2 (1988): 115; Gary B. McGee, "The Radical Strategy in Modern Mission: The Linkage of Paranormal Phenomena with Evangelism," in *The Holy Spirit and Mission Dynamics* (ed. C. Douglas McConnell; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1997), 69–95; Gary B. McGee, "Miracles and Mission Revisited," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 25 (2001): 146–56.

⁴⁵ Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How 20th-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 44–45; Sean C. Kim, "Reenchanted: Divine Healing in Korean Protestantism," in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, 267–85.

- Acts 4:29–30 (ESV): “grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”
- Acts 14:3 (ESV): “So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.”

Although I do not have a gift of healing, I have witnessed God confirming his gospel. The example I offer here comes from well before I was a pastor or professor. I was about nineteen years old, fairly recently converted to faith in Christ. I had begun noticing in the Book of Acts how often healings drew people’s attention for the gospel, and I read in an IVP book called *How to Give Away Your Faith*⁴⁶ that most people do not mind if you offer a prayer for their healing when you are sharing your faith. So I thought I would try it. The first person I prayed for, an older lady at the apartments where I worked, may have appreciated the gesture, but she was not healed.

Another older lady there, however, had pain in her knee, so I asked if I could pray for her. A few days later she returned and announced that her knee had been better ever since I prayed for her. Now, she said, she wanted me to pray for her lungs, because she was coughing up blood and the doctor thought that she had lung cancer. I agreed to pray and see what God would do. Before praying, however, I warned her that whether or not God healed her, she would die someday, and she needed to be ready. So she first accepted Christ. After that I prayed for God to heal her. Soon she told me that her doctor declared that she was now healthy. Undoubtedly many of us have accounts like this, of God using ordinary people who want to share the message about Christ’s love with others.⁴⁷

Let us be open to what God wants us to do with us, even when it stretches us beyond our comfort. God is always sovereign when and where he acts, but Acts encourages us to expect his extraordinary acts at times when we are reaching unbelievers.

4. *Praying and preparing for Pentecost.* Trusting that Jesus would empower them as he had promised, the disciples were praying (1:14) and remained in unity together (1:14; 2:1). This mention of their praying is probably not incidental to the Spirit’s coming here. God is sovereign and does not *only* pour out the Spirit in connection with prayer; but in Acts, God often does so after prayer.

This pattern is not limited to Acts 1–2. It is Luke’s Gospel that emphasizes that the Spirit descended on Jesus when he was “praying” (Luke 3:21–22). In Acts 4:29–30, believers pray together for continued boldness to speak, and in verse 31 they are filled with the Spirit to speak boldly. Peter and John pray for the Samaritans to receive the Spirit (8:15), and they do so (8:17). Saul is praying at length (9:11) before he is filled with the Spirit (9:17). This connection is particularly explicit in

⁴⁶ Paul Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1966; rev. ed. 2008).

⁴⁷ Recounted earlier in *Gift & Giver*, 59.

Luke 11:13. Matthew's parallel promises that God will give "good gifts" to those who ask (Matt 7:11), but Luke 11:13 focuses on God granting the greatest gift: the Holy Spirit.

Toward the end of writing my four-volume Acts commentary, I considered what might be the most personally valuable insight I had acquired from that decade of work. The insight that I concluded was most valuable was not an insight unique to me, nor was it one that required extensive engagement with extrabiblical primary sources or secondary literature. Nevertheless, it was the insight that I found most valuable personally. On several occasions, corporate experiences with the Spirit in Acts follow times of prayer, and this is consistent with Jesus's promise in Luke's Gospel. I believe that this connection in Luke-Acts invites those of us who yearn for more of the work of God's Spirit among us today to begin, more concertedly and consistently, to ask God for it. Whether we call it revival, awakening, or some other name, God knows we need his help.

IV. THE SPIRIT POURED OUT (ACTS 2:16–40)

Peter, speaking for all the apostles, explains the current activity of the Spirit in light of biblical teaching about the promised kingdom era. This observation in turn invites him to explain how Jesus has inaugurated a new era as the Messiah and Lord, and to summon his hearers to the logical conclusion: they too should become followers of this risen Lord.

1. *Expounding Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:16–21)*. Quoting Joel, Peter explains the present event in light of Scripture. The context in Joel shows that Joel's prophecy involves the time of Israel's restoration (Joel 3:1–2; MT and LXX 4:1–2). The prophets sometimes called this period the "last days,"⁴⁸ an expression that Peter therefore uses as an explanatory paraphrase to begin his quotation. Not only Peter here, but the entire NT recognizes that believers have already begun to experience the "last days" (cf. similarly Rom 8:22; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; James 5:3; 1 Pet 1:20; 2 Pet 3:3; 1 John 2:18; Rev 12:5–6, 10).⁴⁹ The "last days" becomes the entire time after Jesus's resurrection, the inauguration of a new era in salvation history. The Spirit is "poured out" not only in Acts 2 but again in 10:44–45.

In keeping with Jesus's instruction in the previous chapter of Acts, Peter identifies the gift as not only eschatological but prophetic. Joel declares that sons and daughters alike would "prophesy," and that young and old alike would experience divinely-given visions and dreams, experiences that earlier Scripture associates most often with prophets. Wishing to reiterate this point, Peter adds to Joel another new, explanatory line that simply reinforces this emphasis: "And they will prophesy" (2:18).

⁴⁸ E.g. Isa 2:2; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1; Dan 2:28; cf. 11Q13 II, 4; 1 En. 27:3–4; also to the period of intense suffering directly before it (Jer 23:20; 30:24; Ezek 38:16; Dan 10:14; cf. T. Dan 5:4; T. Zeb. 9:5; T. Iss. 6:1); note further, e.g., CD 4:4; 6:11; 1QpHab VII, 7, 12; 4Q174 1–2 I, 12.

⁴⁹ Later, cf. *Did.* 16.2–3; *Ign. Eph.* 11.1; *Barn.* 4.9; 6.13; 12.9; 16.5; 2 *Clem.* 14.2.

As just noted, the “last days” encompass the present era. God has poured out the Spirit, and, this still being the last days, there is no reason to suppose that God has poured the Spirit back. In agreement with Sam Storms’s 2017 ETS presidential address, and with D. A. Carson, Craig Blomberg, Wayne Grudem, and many others who have addressed the subject, I affirm continuationism. I have other good friends, however, such as Dan Wallace, Darrell Bock, and Michael Horton, who are cessationists.

Yet most of us in ETS, wherever we fall on this spectrum, share a good deal of common ground on these matters. Most of us recognize that the Twelve were special, and all of us who sign the doctrinal statement recognize that Scripture-writing is not for today. The canon, by definition, is closed; it is thus the measuring stick for evaluating any other claim to hear from God. Prophecy cannot reasonably be understood as coextensive with Scripture: The OT historical books mention scores of prophets whose prophecies are not recorded in Scripture (e.g. Num 11:25–26; 1 Sam 10:10; 1 Kgs 18:4; 2 Kgs 4:38), and, if I may extrapolate from 1 Corinthians 14, it appears that hundreds of thousands of prophecies occurred in first-century house churches that are not recorded in Scripture.⁵⁰ Yet whether we believe any other gifts have ceased, we all recognize that the first-century ministers who knew Jesus in the flesh and were commissioned by him directly, have ceased, and that their teaching provides the standard.

At the same time, virtually all of us also agree that the Spirit still speaks, certainly at least through Scripture,⁵¹ and God’s Spirit bearing witness with our spirits that we are God’s children (Rom 8:16). Presumably all of us agree that the mission to the ends of the earth remains, and that we still need the power of God’s Spirit to carry out that mission. I believe that just as Christ’s body with many members remains today, we also continue to need the full diversity of gifts, given sovereignly as the Lord wills, to build up the body; but all of us agree on at least *most* of the gifts. Many of us here presumably have the gift of teaching, and we do not believe that our teaching adds to Scripture but rather instead helps people to understand it better.

⁵⁰ If we may suppose at least two prophecies (cf. 1 Cor 14:29) on the average week in the average house church from ca. 30 to 100, with a minimally estimated median of at least one hundred house churches during this period, the figure might be above 700,000.

⁵¹ I address this subject more fully in *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); see also, e.g., J. B. Lightfoot, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Newly Discovered Commentary* (ed. Ben Witherington III and Todd D. Still; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 51; Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 340. Note Luther in Craig G. Bartholomew, *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Framework for Hearing God in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 198; Calvin in Osborne, *Spiral*, 340, citing *Inst.* 1:93–95; Timothy George, “General Introduction,” in *Galatians, Ephesians* (ed. Gerald Bray; Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 10; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), xxix; Yuzo Adhinarta, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Major Reformed Confessions and Catechisms of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Monographs, 2012), 38; and an early Baptist scholar in Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 122.

But again, Luke's primary emphasis is Spirit-empowered witness, as in 1:8. Whatever else we believe about the Spirit empowering other kinds of prophetic speech, nearly all of us here will affirm that the Spirit empowers us to speak the "word of the Lord" that predominates in most of Acts—the message of the gospel.

This passage also shows that this gift is for ordinary people like us. As we have noted, in 2:38–39, the gift is explicitly for all who repent, even those in other times and places. In 2:17–18, it is for both young and old—for example, young like John in his mother's womb or Philip's virgin daughters (Luke 1:15, 41; Acts 21:9), or old like Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25, 36). It is for both genders—again, like Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25–36) or like Philip's daughters and Agabus (Acts 21:9–11).

In short, the Spirit will be poured out on "all flesh" (as in 2:17)—an emphasis that will, unknown to Peter at this point, eventually include even Gentiles, who are among those in 2:39 who are "far off."⁵² That is, the Spirit not only would empower the first witnesses to reach all nations. The Spirit would also empower the Gentile believers to join this mission of being witnesses. The ideal that all God's people would prophesy appears already as a wish of Moses (Num 11:29) but becomes a promise in Joel that is fulfilled from Pentecost forward.

In Acts, when new groups of people receive the gospel, they themselves also receive the Spirit, even if they are Samaritans (8:14–17) or Gentiles (10:44–47; 11:15–16; 15:8). Luke's emphasis on their reception of the Spirit presumably means for them precisely what it means for all believers in 1:8, 2:17–18, and 2:38–39: God is empowering them to carry on the commission. While experienced believers must offer wise guidance, we also must trust the Spirit who works among us to work among others as well, to carry on the task of sharing the gospel. This is not a paternalistic approach to mission, but a model of partnership.⁵³

Returning briefly to the question of whether some of the more debated gifts remain today, I personally love to pray in tongues, though I did not know that was what it was called when I started experiencing it. Two days after my conversion from atheism 43 years ago, I had not had opportunity to read that far in the Bible yet. But I was overwhelmed with such a sense of God's majesty that I felt I needed him to give me the words with which to praise him, and since God knows all languages I did not mind it coming out in one that I did not know.

Yet having said that, it is easy for an exclusively Pauline emphasis on tongues in private prayer, which I also appreciate, to miss the point of Luke's emphasis here. In Acts 2, the worship of God's servants in tongues is developed in the reversal of Babel in 2:5–13 and repeated on two other occasions in Acts. These tongues on the

⁵² Echoing Isa 57:19; cf., e.g., Frans Neirynek, "Luke 4,16–30 and the Unity of Luke-Acts," in *The Unity of Luke-Acts* (ed. Joseph Verheyden; BETL 142; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 378; David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (WUNT 2/130; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 230; esp. James A. Meek, *The Gentile Mission in Old Testament Citations in Acts: Text, Hermeneutic and Purpose* (LNTS 385; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 110–11 (who allows even Peter's understanding).

⁵³ See Miller, *Empowered*, passim.

Day of Pentecost reinforce Luke's point about cross-cultural mission. Peter associates their speaking in 2:4 with the Spirit of prophecy in 2:17–18. It is speech empowered by God. But that God empowers the believers to worship in other people's languages reminds us about the meaning of this empowerment—not only for those with this particular gift today but for the church as a whole. As 1:8 announces, Jesus's followers must speak for him even “to the ends of the earth.”⁵⁴

In the late nineteenth century, many radical evangelicals were praying for God to empower them for reaching the world for Christ, a task they wanted to complete by the year 1900.⁵⁵ In the next decade, the Welsh revival, a revival at Pandita Ramabai's orphanage in India,⁵⁶ and the Azusa Street revival all followed in quick succession. The last was led by humble African-American holiness preacher named William Seymour. Unfortunately, even in the multiracial Pentecostal movement spread by this revival,⁵⁷ Jim Crow racism quickly reared its head. Seymour continued to value what he considered Pentecostal experience, but his emphasis gradually shifted to this central element of Acts 2. Acts 2 foreshadows the mission for Christ to all nations, a mission continued throughout Acts and continuing today. Seymour warned against claiming to be filled with the Holy Spirit unless one loves and serves one's brothers and sisters in Christ across racial and cultural lines⁵⁸

2. *The preaching of Pentecost (Acts 2:22–40)*. Jewish people expected the coming of the Messiah and the resurrection as eschatological events; if these events have occurred in Jesus, then the time of the Spirit's outpouring has begun, even though believers await the consummation of some of God's other promises.

Peter recognizes that Joel associates the outpouring of the Spirit with the promised time when God's people will be saved by calling on the Lord's name (Acts 2:21 citing Joel 2:32). Peter's message moves quickly from the sign that at-

⁵⁴ See discussion in J. W. Packer, *Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 27; Keener, *Acts*, 1:828–31; for the connection, cf. earlier Chrysostom, *Hom. Cor.* 35.1; Leo the Great, *Sermon* 75.2; Bede, *Commentary on Acts* 2.3A.

⁵⁵ See Gary B. McGee, “Shortcut to Language Preparation? Radical Evangelicals, Missions, and the Gift of Tongues,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 25 (July 2001): 118–23; idem, *Miracles, Missions, & American Pentecostalism* (American Society of Missiology Series 45; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 61–76; Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 33–34.

⁵⁶ On Ramabai, see, e.g., Nalini Arles, “Pandita Ramabai and Amy Carmichael: A Study of Their Contributions toward Transforming the Position of Indian Women” (M.Th. thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1985); Ruth Vassar Burgess, “Pandita Ramabai: A Woman for All Seasons: Pandita Ramabai Saraswati Mary Dongre Medhavi (1858–1922),” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 9.2 (2006): 183–98; Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 382–410.

⁵⁷ On which, cf. Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 63, 260–62; Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 183; Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 88, 137–38.

⁵⁸ Cf. Cecil M. Robeck Jr., “William J. Seymour and ‘The Bible Evidence,’” in *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism* (ed. Gary B. McGee; Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1991), 81–89; Jacobsen, *Thinking*, 78.

tracts his audience's attention to the message that the sign attests: from pneumatology to Christology. The Spirit empowered Peter, and empowers us, to proclaim the gospel of Christ. If the Spirit in Acts is the Spirit of prophecy, the prophetic message in Acts par excellence, the "word of the Lord," is the saving gospel of Christ. (Similarly, John 16:13–15 shows that the Spirit comes to honor *Christ*.)

In light of the OT, no one but God could pour out God's own Spirit (e.g. Isa 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28–29); that Jesus pours out God's Spirit in Acts 2:33 demonstrates that he is divine. It thus makes good sense when Luke later speaks of the Spirit as "the Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7; cf. Rom 8:9; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11).⁵⁹ Peter here also applies "calling on the Lord's name" in 2:21, where he is quoting an OT text about Yahweh, to being baptized in Jesus's name (i.e. recognizing Jesus as Lord at one's baptism) in 2:38.⁶⁰

Now that the prophetic Spirit shows that the era of salvation has arrived, Peter expounds the name of the Lord on whom, according to Joel, they are to call (Acts 2:21). Joel speaks of YHWH's name, but Peter shows that the specific divine name they must invoke is that of Jesus. From Psalm 16, he shows that the one beside God is the risen one (Acts 2:25–28); he then cites the evidence of eyewitnesses that Jesus is the risen and exalted one (2:29–33). He further demonstrates from Psalm 110 that the one beside God is not David himself but David's Lord (2:34–35), thus declaring that Jesus is the Lord (2:36). It is his name, therefore, on which they must call in 2:38.

In some parts of the world, such as the West, increasing relativism has weakened the preaching of Christ. According to some surveys, even many U.S. evangelicals now believe that some can be saved without Christ.⁶¹ Church history seems to illustrate that when some movements in the church lose sight of God's mission, God often raises up other movements to carry on his work. Those who are empowered by the Spirit must exercise boldness in preaching Christ, the only true Lord and Savior of the world (see Acts 4:12).

⁵⁹ Cf. M. M. B. Turner, "The Spirit of Christ and Christology," in *Christ the Lord* (ed. H. H. Rowdon; Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1982), 168–90. Jesus's deity appears in our earliest NT sources; see David B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's Christology* (WUNT 2/47; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); David B. Capes, *The Divine Christ: Paul, the Lord Jesus, and the Scriptures of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018); Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Chris Tilling, *Paul's Divine Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Andrew Ter Ern Loke, *The Origins of Divine Christology* (SNTSMS 169; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Richard Bauckham, "Is 'High Human Christology' Sufficient? A Critical Response to J. R. Daniel Kirk's *A Man Attested by God*," *BBR* 27 (2017): 503–25.

⁶⁰ See e.g., Turner, *Power*, 272; Pao, *New Exodus*, 231–32; Marshall, "Acts," 536, 543.

⁶¹ Cf. James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 34–35; George Barna, *What Americans Believe* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1991), 83–85; Barna Trends 2017: *What's New and What's Next at the Intersection of Faith and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 179. For a recent and thorough response to universalism, see Michael J. McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

V. THE FRUITS OF PENTECOST (ACTS 2:41–47)

Even though Judeans practiced various forms of ceremonial washing, they normally reserved conversion baptism for Gentiles.⁶² In 2:41, however, three thousand Jewish people receive immersion in one day,⁶³ illustrating the depth of their commitment. Evangelism frames the final unit of Luke's introductory narrative section in 2:41–47, although it is evangelism in two different ways. In 2:41, three thousand people are converted as a result of Peter's preaching; in 2:47, people continue to join Jesus's movement apparently because they are drawn by the radical lifestyle of Jesus's followers.

Luke's focus is Spirit-empowered mission, but 2:41–47 shows that he also cares about the ultimate result of mission: God's united, multicultural people (in this early case in Acts, both Judean and immigrant Jews).

Acts 2:42, 46–47 recounts believers' continuing unity in prayer and worship and in learning about Christ. In 2:44–45, the believers even demonstrate their love for one another by sharing with all who have need; this happens again the next time that God fills his people together with the Spirit (4:31–35).⁶⁴ (Although Scripture leads us to trust God to supply our basic needs, Luke's emphases certainly undermine modern prosperity teachings about God making believers materially rich.)⁶⁵ Not only Peter's preaching in 2:41, but also the continuing lifestyle of the new community of believers in 2:47, produces successful evangelism. In John 13:35 and 17:21–23, Jesus says that nonbelievers will learn of him through how we love one another and walk in unity.

Although Luke does not use Paul's terminology, "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22), Luke clearly does believe that the Spirit shapes our character. God does not merely send proclaimers to reach people in other cultures and then leave the groups separate. Acts 2 closes with a community in unity, and subsequently in Acts,

⁶² Cf., e.g., *m. Pesah.* 8:8; *t. Abod. Zar.* 3:11; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.9.20; possibly *Sib. Or.* 4.162–65; Juvenal, *Sat.* 14.104; Justin, *Dial.* 29.1; further discussion in, e.g., H. H. Rowley, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism and the Baptism of John," *HUCA* 15 (1940): 313–34; F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 156; Lawrence H. Schiffman, "At the Crossroads: Tannaic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism," in *Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period* (ed. E. P. Sanders with A. I. Baumgarten and Alan Mendelson; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 128; Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament* (ed. Jürgen Roloff; trans. John E. Alsup; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981–1982), 1:37; Ladd, *Theology*, 41; Keener, *Acts*, 1:979–82.

⁶³ For the sufficiency of the temple mount's water resources for such immersions, see Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.12; discussion in Shemuel Safrai, "The Temple," in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* (2 vols.; ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern with D. Flusser and W. C. van Unnik; vol. 1: Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp., B.V., 1974; vol. 2: Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 884; John R. McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 122–24; Bill Grasham, "Archaeology and Christian Baptism," *ResQ* 43.2 (2001): 113–16; Keener, *Acts*, 1:994–95. For the plausibility of the estimated number of converts, see my "The Plausibility of Luke's Growth Figures in Acts 2:41; 4:4; 21:20," *Journal of Greco Roman Christianity and Judaism* 7 (2010): 140–63.

⁶⁴ Indeed, the demand to sacrifice ownership of one's possessions is sometimes the response to the question of what one must do to follow the kingdom (Luke 3:10–11; 18:18, 22), along with repentance (Acts 2:37–38) and faith in Jesus Christ (16:30–31).

⁶⁵ Cf. the balanced exposition in Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

believers continue to share table fellowship regardless of cultural differences (10:23, 48; 11:3; 16:34).⁶⁶ If Jesus is our Lord, then all of his people are our brothers and sisters.

Christians today come from many cultures and backgrounds; Christians in Africa, Asia and Latin America now far outnumber Christians in the West.⁶⁷ The one gospel and one Spirit make us the one body of Christ, wherever we are from, and whatever our particulars on points secondary to the gospel—differences, for example, on millennial views or denominational affiliations. My wife, for example, is black and grew up in the Evangelical Church of Congo in Central Africa; I am a bald white convert from atheism who was ordained in an African-American Baptist church in the United States. Whatever our differences, we, like the disciples before Pentecost, need to pray together in unity. We desperately need God's power for God's mission.

Matters are not always what they appear. Acts ultimately focuses on Paul and the cross-cultural, predominantly Gentile mission. Paul's hard-won Bible study groups throughout the eastern Mediterranean could not compare numerically with Jerusalem's "megachurch" commendably relevant to its local culture in Acts 21:20. In light of the impending judgment on Jerusalem, however (Luke 19:43–44; 21:20–24), the immediate future lay more with Paul's mission. It is not ours to predict all the details of the future. Rather, it is ours to obey whatever Christ commands us for our role in his larger great commission, knowing that he who does know the future will accomplish his purposes in the church by the Spirit.

VI. CONCLUSION: THE SPIRIT AND MISSION

The Spirit empowers us in a range of ways, but one of the essential ways, emphasized in Acts, is reaching the world for Christ. The same Spirit who enabled the prophets to speak for God, the same Spirit who anointed Jesus for his mission, the same Spirit who empowered the first Christians for their mission in Acts, is the same Spirit who empowers us to reach the world today.

Jesus's promise in Luke 11:13 remains relevant: "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"⁶⁸ Acts shows that this principle invites believers to pray for the work of the Spirit in the church and in our lives.

In a world where billions have never received the gospel, where in many traditional western circles passion for missions is waning, and where churches of Africa,

⁶⁶ Cf. Luke's emphasis on unity as expressed in the term in Acts 1:14; 2:46; and again in 4:24; 5:12; and 15:25 (though applying the term elsewhere to united opposition). On the theme of unity in Acts, see Alan J. Thompson, "The Unity of the Church in Acts in Its Literary Setting" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2004); idem, *One Lord, One People: The Unity of the Church in Acts in Its Literary Setting* (LNTS; London: T&T Clark, 2008).

⁶⁷ See Jehu J. Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 121–22.

⁶⁸ For specific prayers for the work of the Spirit, cf. Ps 51:11; 143:10; Rom 15:13; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 1:17; 3:16.

Asia and Latin America are increasingly taking the lead in world missions, this emphasis bears repeating in new ways for the twenty-first century. The gospel does not belong to any one people. Jesus gives us both a commission and a promise: despite persecution and obstacles, the good news of our Lord will reach the ends of the earth.

In light of the availability of prayer and the Lord's promise, the best may be yet to come.