

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: The Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts

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Abstract


This article briefly reviews research conducted into Lukan pneumatology, particularly attempting to elucidate certain roles of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts. This is specified by clarifying why the Lukan messages of the Spirit are significant and unique, how Luke implicitly emphasizes Christ's baptism with the Spirit among Jews in his Gospel and among the Gentiles in Acts, and what Lukan pneumatological theory is partially continuous, albeit different from Paul's perspectives. The article considers at the end the implications of the Spirit for contemporary Christian practice.

Keywords: Acts, Holy Spirit, Luke, Pneumatology, Spirit baptism

1. Introduction

Each Gospel has its unique messages of the Holy Spirit. The “herald trumpet” of the Gospel of Matthew announces Jesus as the King and prophetic fulfillment, in that the role of the church (ecclesiology) and the identification of Jesus (Christology) are two distinct elements of Matthew's elucidation of the Spirit. The “percussion” of the Gospel of Mark reflects the conflict, action, and role of servanthood, in that its reference to the Spirit primarily shows the superiority of the ministry of Jesus over John the Baptist's, identifying Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. The “resonation” of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles declares the joy, praise, prayer, and bright wind of the Spirit, in that the distinct works of the Spirit in Luke-Acts are to witness the ministry of Jesus and to bring about the working of salvation in the church, respectively.¹ The “ponderous bass” of the Gospel of John presents the divinity of infinite God becoming flesh.

The current paper views messages from the Holy Spirit in order to better understanding how to apply our practical knowledge and experience with the Spirit to our evangelization.² Since it is considerably observed that Luke has a noteworthy interest in the Spirit, thereby, the current paper places a particular emphasis on Luke-Acts, which present a unique message

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¹I.e., to give orders to Jesus' apostles and to enable interpreting the Scriptures, respectively. Cf., Carson, Moo & Morris (2005, pp. 121, 125). More specifically, the account of the birth of Jesus is recorded only by the Luke narrative in the four Gospels. The parables portrayed God's love for the unlovable, such as the good Samaritan (10:25-37), the prodigal son (15:11-32), the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31), the ten healed of leprosy (17:11-17), and the Pharisee and publican (18:9-14), are came only from Luke. Therefore, some scholars call the Gospel of Luke the “loveliest book in the world,” since these splendid parables of Jesus would be unknown otherwise. See González (2015); and Lu (2017).

²It is noteworthy that a purely harmonic approach to study the role of the Holy Spirit from only one Gospel author puts the unity of the Church at risk. Since each author only addresses each distinctive perspective on the Holy Spirit, when one group tries to champion one author's pneumatology over another, misunderstandings, divisions, and pains ensue.

of the Spirit by involving the narratives on the life and ministry of Jesus.³ Specifically, the current paper in the following (1) identifies why Luke-Acts are considered to be of significant importance to the study of the Spirit, (2) describes how specific events in the life and ministry of Jesus are presented in Luke-Acts, emphasizing to readers the movements of the Spirit in these events, (3) compares Luke-Acts and the epistles of Paul in their treatments of the messages of the Spirit to their audience, as well as their implications to the Church today, and (4) summarizes the uniquely important Pentecostal understanding on the phrase “the baptism with the Holy Spirit” in our devotional lives and for missions.

2. In Luke’s Gospel

It is particularly important to study Lukan pneumatology. Luke tells us that Jesus was praying when the Holy Spirit came upon Him at His baptism (3:21-22). Throughout Luke’s Gospel as well as the Acts of the Apostles, the Spirit and His gifts and miracles become the very nature of the case indispensable for the renewed interest in interpreting a sharp disagreement on the role of the Spirit in conversion, empowerment, and the nature of Christian experience. Actually one of the main reasons Luke wrote his Gospel is to point out the role of the Holy Spirit in effecting miracles and in inspiring witnesses “that have been fulfilled among us” (1:1).⁴ The rise of the Charismatic Movement and the Pentecostal which also center on the role of the Spirit and glossolalia merits the need to study in the two narratives by Luke for the church today.

In the Gospel, certain people are enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak authoritatively in prophecy. Priest Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, are enabled by the Spirit to receive the prophecy that they would bear a son to be called John who would be filled with the Spirit even before his birth (1:13-15). A man called Simeon in Jerusalem is enabled and revealed by the Spirit, praising God and speaking the prophecy (2:25-35). A prophet called Anna is enabled by the Spirit to “speak about the Child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (2:36-38). John the son of Zechariah is revealed by the word of God to speak the prophecy in the wilderness (3:2-19). After Jesus is baptized by John, the Spirit descends on Him in bodily form like a dove, and He opens His ministry way since then (3:22; 4:1, 14, 18).

According to Luke, the role of the Holy Spirit in the prophecy even before Jesus’ birth is to announce the radical newness of God’s salvation through His birth. God’s Son is born of a virgin, is conceived by the power of the Spirit, and is God Himself coming from the heaven into this world. The Spirit announces that Jesus is the final and eternal King of Israel (1:35). Mary is the principal character, and the angel Gabriel is sent from God to speak to her. Therefore, the good news is announced by the angel Gabriel, representing as the power of the Spirit to Mary. As a result, Mary responds to the Spirit with her faithfulness: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (1:38). The Spirit influences Mary for the conception of Jesus.⁵ Another role of the Holy Spirit portrayed by Luke happens in the infancy narrative of Jesus when young Jesus came to the temple. Simeon and Anna are the principal characters who are opened to the Spirit’s inspiration to witness Jesus as the Anointed of the Lord and as God’s salvation (2:25-27). The Spirit reveals things to them and enables them to speak authoritatively in prophecy.

³Since Luke is identified as a fellow-laborer (Philem. 24) and “the beloved physician” (Col. 4:14), his occupation and education endow him an orderly manner and a careful scholar, which guarantees him using the best sources available in an effort to give an accurate and well-structured account on writing the message of Jesus. For example, we could infer that owing to his rigorously fact-based training by his physician occupation, he utilizes the testimony of identification, such as that he mentions the “eyewitnesses and servants of the word” (Lk. 1:2), to strengthen the reliability of his testimony.

⁴Cf., Shelton (2000). Another reason that Luke wrote the Gospel is to enable Theophilus, other Gentiles from his day, and all men of subsequent generations to be certain of the truth about the Christ (1:1-4).

⁵See Spencer (2012, pp. 55-100).

There are several strident distinctions between John the Baptist and Jesus Christ on the works of the Holy Spirit in their lives. First, John is filled with the Spirit while in the womb (1:15), whereas Jesus is born of a virgin and is conceived by the power of the Spirit Himself (1:35).⁶ Second, John cannot release the Spirit being filled in his body to others. However, after Jesus is conceived by the power of the Spirit (3:22), the Spirit can be released through Jesus to become active in others (3:16). Even John receives the Spirit from the presence of Jesus. Third, the reception of the Spirit is highlighted as the contrast between John's water baptism without the Spirit and Christ's water baptism with the Spirit (cf., 3:16; see also Acts 1:5).⁷ Fourth, Jesus is led by the Spirit either from one place to another (e.g., to the wilderness; 4:1)⁸ and Galilee (4:14), or to conduct His ministry on earth, or is anointed by the Spirit to preach good news, or to proclaim freedom, or to recovery of sight, or to release burden, or to proclaim the Lord's favor (4:18), whereas John is not mentioned in Luke if he is led or not by the Spirit.⁹

Luke's consideration on the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit has four characteristics. First, Luke warns and encourages believers to avoid sinking into the danger of eternal sin by saying blasphemy against the Spirit; instead, he encourages believers to confidently rely on the Spirit to give boldly inspired witnesses. Therefore, Luke makes a deliberate choice to drop one synoptic version which he found in Mark and probably Matthew, then replacing it with a new application. Second, Jesus' teachings on the blasphemy against the Spirit in Luke are addressed to His disciples, but the same blasphemy's audiences in Matthew and Mark are to Jesus' enemies. John M. Creed even resumes that Luke's presentation of the blasphemy against the Spirit prefers a more generalized audience in contrast to a more specific identification in the synoptic parallels of Matthew and Mark.¹⁰ Third, Luke's presentation of the blasphemy against the Spirit is both sobering and reassuring. Luke warns believers of Jesus eternal apostasy by a failure to give inspired witnesses, which are the blasphemy against the Spirit. Fourth, Luke includes the blasphemy logion in an abbreviated form when contrasted with Matthew and Mark; that is, Luke only includes one verse on the blasphemy of the Spirit, while Matthew and Mark all include more than one verse.¹¹

3. In Acts

In contrast to Luke's Gospel which addresses the Holy Spirit in a manner of foregrounding Christian personal experiences, Acts neither concerns the importance of individual experience,¹² nor emphasizes the Christians becoming members of Christ's people; rather, the dominating intention of Acts is to narrate converts who are bestowed upon the gifts of the Spirit by Christ,¹³ which are not acquired by money (cf., 8:20), but are the gratuitous kindness of God. Further, receivers of the Spirit are not only the circumcised Jews but also the Gentiles (cf., 10:45; 15:8-9), as indicated by such signs as speaking in other tongues (i.e., glossolalia; cf., 2:4, 11; 10:46; 19:6)¹⁴ and extolling God (e.g., 13:52). The reception of the Spirit by the Gentiles reconciles the controversy about their inclusion as a part in the Atonement promised to Israel when it arises in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem Council.¹⁵

⁶Cf., [Spencer \(1992\)](#).

⁷See [Wilson \(2016\)](#).

⁸See [Fuller \(2010\)](#).

⁹See [Kodell \(1982, pp. 12-23\)](#).

¹⁰See [Creed \(1930; repr., 1942\)](#).

¹¹Cf., [Shelton \(2000\)](#).

¹²E.g., Luke never mentions the slightest clue of the exact time that the disciples and even Saul converted. See [Wilson \(2016\)](#).

¹³Cf., [Barrett \(2002, p. lxi\)](#).

¹⁴Cf., [van Alten \(2017\)](#).

¹⁵Cf., [Macchia \(2018\)](#).

Luke understands purgation of hearts as a crucial function of the Spirit, in that the Spirit is “automatically co-incident with the cleansing of salvation.”¹⁶

Contrary to the voice of Satan (i.e., demons or the unclean spirits) in 5:1-4 which fills in the heart of Ananias to enable him to speak the lie,¹⁷ the voice of the Holy Spirit helps evangelistic enterprises of Christ’s water baptism with the Spirit in the Gentiles in the early Christian mission.¹⁸ “Waiting on the Holy Spirit” (1:4) becomes the God’s plan of salvation.¹⁹ The new covenant life is therefore accomplished through the works of the Spirit at or near the time of water baptism, which enables the new converts to take an effective part in the evangelistic mission, viz. boldly proclaiming the good news of Jesus (e.g., 28:25), healing (e.g., 5:12-16), tongues (e.g., 2:4-6), guidance (e.g., 13:2-3), miracles (e.g., 3:1-10), and rejoicing (e.g., 8:39).

4. Lukan vs. Pauline Pneumatology

A rich history of pneumatological research has accredited that Luke’s presentation of the Holy Spirit closely follows Paul’s grids in attributing soteriological significance to the gift of the Spirit.²⁰ Further, Lukan pneumatology also connects the fullness of the Spirit with Paul’s inspired speech, that is, the Epistle to the Ephesians, aiming to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18b) and to speak to one another with “spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19a). Likewise, Luke describes that the apostles “were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues” (Acts 2:4) at Pentecost. Besides, both of the presentations link the Spirit with effectual prayer, such as that “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (Rom. 8:26c), and after Peter and John prayed, they are all filled with the Spirit and speak the word of God boldly (Acts 4:31).

Nevertheless, there are some profound differences between Pauline and Lukan presentations of the work of the Holy Spirit. Pauline pneumatology is pervasive and broad in its scope, often addressing the conversable role of the Spirit and its all-embracing influence on one’s life. For instance, Paul uses such phrases as “the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2), “the mind controlled by the Spirit” (Rom. 8:6), and “led by the Spirit” (Rom. 8:14) to describe Christian conversion and lifestyle. On the contrary, Luke’s presentation is much narrower, putting an emphasis of the role of the Spirit on the power of mission. For example, Luke uses such phrases as “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Lk. 1:15, 41) and “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit” (Lk. 4:1) or such sentence as “the Holy Spirit was upon him [Simeon]” (Lk. 2:25), to indicate that inspired witnesses, even as the Lord Himself, are about to happen or have occurred. Another function of the Spirit Luke connects with is the responsibility for praise, joy, miraculous deeds, the kingdom, and prayer. Besides, for Paul, the Spirit is received at conversion while for Luke Spirit-reception follows conversion.²¹

While Pauline presentation often addresses the question “what is the Holy Spirit’s role in the conversion,” Luke is more interested in the role which empowers believers to witness. Paul and Luke ask different questions regarding the Spirit, thus emphasizing various aspects of the activities of the Spirit. Many of Luke’s importantly distinctive views of the Spirit would be lost if his work were indiscriminately mixed together with Pauline or the other Gospel writers’ pneumatology. In other words, when one tries to interpret Pauline

¹⁶Atkinson (2011, p. 15).

¹⁷Cf., Lu (2019).

¹⁸E.g., an angel tells Philip to go south to preach the good news about Jesus to an Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40), an angel tells Cornelius in a vision (or probably a dream) to bring back Peter (10:1-23), and an angel tells Paul probably in a dream not to be afraid (27:23-24), in which the pivotal role of the angels of the Lord has a remarkably similar function with the role of the Spirit. Cf., Atkinson (2006); and Lu (2016).

¹⁹Cf., Wall (2013).

²⁰Cf., Haya-Prats (2011); and Dunn (1970, pp. 90-102); for a holistic understanding of the work of the Spirit in Luke-Acts and the Pauline epistles, that is, grace, unity, and fellowship in preaching and sermons, see Cho (2005).

²¹Cf., Atkinson (2011, p. 125).

pneumatology through Luke's points of view or vice versa, a doctrinal imbalance occurs. Therefore, it is important not only to recognize their differences, but also to know that it does not mean that they disagree with each other on the Spirit.

5. Conclusion

Although the Pentecostal and charismatic movements have partially influenced the acceleration of the pneumatological output in recent decades, the church today still needs more roles of the Holy Spirit to spread the good news of Jesus. Sometimes, some churches solo track on some skills, such as certain preaching procedures or brochures (e.g., the Life of Bridge), to attract unbelievers' interest on the good news, but prayers for the Spirit's works on people (Acts 4:23-31) and the abidance of the Spirit are in turn less done in comparison with relying on their own world view. We need to go back to the original point, learning how the earliest church was prosperous in number and how the Gospel and its potential value of the missionary activities were spread widely. Luke records that the Christians in the era of Jesus' time hardly prayed together for seeking the Spirit's coming down. Hence, it should be reminded in the church today that the Spirit is the original source and power of the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. It is hoped that Pentecostals should put their understanding of Lukan pneumatology into practice, ensuring that they have received the power of the Spirit Jesus promised and implementing the Spirit in witnessing to Jesus (Acts 1:8).

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