



MAKING A PROPHET

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Acts 2 and the
Church's Mission

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BACKGROUND TO PENTECOST

ἀλλὰ λήψετε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος
ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες ἐν τε Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ
[ἐν] πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρείᾳ καὶ ἕως ἑσχάτου
τῆς γῆς.
Acts 1:8

The first chapter of the book of Acts presents us with both an ending and a beginning. Bringing to a close the period of his earthly ministry, Jesus' ascent into heaven also marks the beginning of a new act in the drama of the NT, that of the public mission of the church.

The exact nature of the relationship between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of his church will be a matter of continuing interest for us throughout the pages that follow. Within this booklet, I will attempt to demonstrate that the events of Pentecost set the church apart as a prophetic community. Bringing the text of the opening chapters of the book of Acts into conversation with particular texts within the OT, I hope to explore the

manner in which accounts of prophetic call, anointing and succession can provide a helpful lens through which to view the events of Pentecost. In making my case, I will be devoting most of my attention to a closer analysis of Acts 2:1-4.

This is not the first study to explore the theme of prophetic anointing in Acts 2. In *The Prophethood of All Believers*, Roger Stronstad devotes a chapter to the event of Pentecost, which he claims inaugurates ‘the prophethood of all believers.’¹ The theme is also highlighted by some commentators in the course of their treatment of the passage, and in wider treatments of Luke-Acts.² Within *Echoes of Scripture in Luke-Acts*, Kenneth Litwak identifies a number of the OT passages that the narrative of the early chapters of Acts evokes, unearthing some neglected allusions to prophetic call and succession narratives in the process.

Building upon the foundation that these writers have established, and entering into constructive conversation with them, I hope to probe deeper into the OT background for the prophetic themes that surface in Luke’s account of Pentecost. Attempting an intertextual reading of Acts 2, I aim to prove the theological and exegetical value of understanding the account in terms of OT accounts of prophetic call, anointing and succession.

¹ Stronstad 1999, 70

² E.g. Wall 2002, 54-55; Keener 1997, 190ff; Johnson 1992, 12-14.

Jesus and the Church in Luke-Acts

For Luke the ministry of the church is inseparably connected to Jesus' own ministry, something highlighted by the resumptive character of his introduction to the book of Acts.³ As Ben Witherington argues, Luke situates his account of Jesus within a 'wider historical framework', giving considerable prominence to the events preceding the birth of John the Baptist at the very outset of his narrative and closely following the subsequent growth of the church in the second volume of his work.⁴ Remarking on the limited attention that Luke gives to Peter's confession in his gospel, in contrast to the accent placed on the accounts of the commissioning of the Twelve and the Seventy between which it is sandwiched, Witherington writes:

Nowhere is it made more apparent than in this sequence that Jesus is the initiator of a series of events and proclamations that his disciples undertake during and then after his time. The focus is not just on Jesus but on the historical Jesus movement of which he was the catalyst and focal point.⁵

In adopting a narrow focus on the identity and personal ministry of Jesus we are in danger of failing to appreciate the degree to which the Lukan treatment of the early church is driven by more than a merely

³ Witherington 1998, 9ff; Wall 2002, 37-38

⁴ Witherington 1998, 21-24

⁵ *Ibid*, 23-24

biographical or historical interest. For Luke the church plays a key role in the drama of God's salvation, both as the place where that salvation is realized and as the agency through whom it is borne witness to and spread.

Baptism, Ascension, and Elijah Typology

Immediately prior to his ascension, Jesus promises his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift for which they must wait in Jerusalem. Recalling the contrast drawn by John the Baptist in Luke 3:16, Jesus speaks of the reception of the Spirit in terms of the language of baptism. By describing the church's forthcoming reception of the Holy Spirit in such a manner, Jesus presents the event that is about to occur to the church as somehow analogous to the type of event that John's baptism represented. The baptism with water administered by John the Baptist will now be followed by a baptism with the Spirit that Jesus will perform on his disciples.

Within Lukan theology, John's baptism is presented as playing a preparatory role (cf. Acts 19:1-6).⁶ It prepared the people for the coming kingdom of God and also served as the 'launching-pad' for Jesus' own work.⁷ In Luke's gospel we see that Jesus' own baptism by John the Baptist marked the beginning of his public ministry (Luke 3:20-22), a detail that is given significance in the first chapter of Acts (Acts 1:21-22). In the narrative of Luke's gospel, John's baptism of Jesus also marks the end of

⁶ *Ibid*, 571

⁷ Wright 1996, 228

John's place in the foreground of the gospel narrative. Once the ministry of Jesus has gotten off the ground, the purpose of John's ministry has more or less been accomplished.⁸

Within the gospels John the Baptist is presented 'as in some sense Elijah *redivivus*.'⁹ In an allusion to the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6, the angel Gabriel declares to Zecharias that his son John will go before the Lord ἐν πνεύματι καὶ δυνάμει Ἡλίου (Luke 1:17). Elsewhere, Jesus declares that John was the Elijah that was promised to come (Matthew 17:10-13). The description and narrative of John the Baptist is also replete with allusions to the description and narrative of the prophet Elijah.¹⁰

Perhaps it is significant that John's baptism of Jesus takes place on the far side of the Jordan: this was the place where Elisha succeeded Elijah (2 Kings 2) and Joshua took over from Moses (Joshua 1). In all cases the succession involves a crossing or coming out of the river

⁸ A point made more explicitly in the fourth gospel (John 1:29-34; 3:27-30).

⁹ Wright 1996, 167

¹⁰ John the Baptist is an ascetic and peripatetic prophet who, like Elijah, calls Israel to repentance in light of coming judgment. He dresses like Elijah (Mark 1:6; cf. 2 Kings 1:8) and, like Elijah, is associated with the wilderness. Like Elijah, his ministry is opposed by a tyrant with a manipulative wife (Herod & Herodias / Ahab & Jezebel). Significantly, John the Baptist's ministry begins at the geographical location where Elijah's ministry ended (Matthew 3:1; Mark 1:4-5; cf. 2 Kings 2:4-11 [Dapaah 2005, 42]).

and a reception of the Spirit (Deuteronomy 34:9; Joshua 1:10-18; 2 Kings 2:9-15; Luke 3:21-22).¹¹

At Jesus' baptism by John, the Spirit descends upon him in the form of a dove (Luke 3:22), fills him and leads him into the wilderness (Luke 4:1). Within Lukan theology, there is a very close connection between filling with the Spirit and prophecy (Luke 1:15, 41-45, 67; Acts 2:4, 17-18; 4:8, 31; 7:55-56; 13:9-11).¹² Jesus' characterization of himself as a prophet in Luke 4:24, in the context of his reading of Isaiah 61:1-2 is significant. It is the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism that sets him apart as a prophet.¹³ The connection between baptism and investiture is an important one for our purposes:¹⁴ the church's reception of the Spirit in the 'baptism' of Pentecost needs to be understood as an ordination for prophetic ministry.

Luke does not limit his deployment of Elijah imagery to his treatment of John the Baptist. As N.T. Wright observes, there is strong evidence to suggest that the synoptics also understand the work of Jesus in terms of Elijah typology.¹⁵ It is at the point of Jesus' ascension that this imagery assumes a greater prominence. Commenting

¹¹ We will explain some of the parallels between these passages more closely at a later point of this study.

¹² Dunn 1998, 11-12

¹³ Acts 10:38. Richard Hays argues that Luke presents Jesus as a 'prophetic liberator' [Hays 1996, 117].

¹⁴ Although its focus is on the connection between baptism and priestly ordination, much of Leithart 2003, 87ff is relevant to our case.

¹⁵ Wright 1996, 167

on the ascension account in Luke 24:50-53, Kenneth Litwak writes:

If Luke's audience encountered a story of someone approved by God 'going up' to heaven, they would surely have thought of Elijah's ascension ... since his is the only ascension account in the Scriptures of Israel. The statement in Lk. 24.49 that the disciples would be empowered by the Spirit recalls Elijah's bequest of his 'spirit' to Elisha (4 Kgdms 2.9-10). The use of ἐνδύσησθε in Lk. 24.49 may also be an allusion to Elijah's mantle which was passed on to Elisha (2 Kgdms 2.13)...¹⁶

The OT speaks of the future return of the ascended Elijah to restore all things (Malachi 4:5-6; cf. Sirach 48:10), a theme that also appears in the NT (Mark 9:12; Matthew 17:11). Significantly, Luke ascribes to the ascended Jesus that which was traditionally ascribed to Elijah: in Acts 3:21 he speaks of Jesus as the one ὃν δεῖ οὐρανὸν μὲν δεῖξασθαι ἄχρι χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως (cf. Acts 1:11).¹⁷

Giving the dominance of such Elijah imagery in the context of the ascension, Jesus' promise of the Spirit immediately prior to his rapture must take on an added significance. The Elijah imagery provides the typological adhesive binding together ascension, Pentecost and

¹⁶ Litwak 2005, 147

¹⁷ Zwiep 1997, 114-116

parousia.¹⁸ Within the frame provided by the Elijah typology, an intimate connection is seen to exist between the ascension and Pentecost narratives. Consequently, any attempt to understand the events of Pentecost must begin by giving attention to the Lukan ascension accounts.

The Ascension and the Prophetic Anointing of the Church

Just as Jesus' baptism by John marked the beginning of his prophetic ministry and his succession from John's own ministry, so the ascension and Pentecost mark the time when the church is anointed for its prophetic ministry and the transition from Jesus' public earthly ministry to that of the church.

The two most important prophetic succession narratives of the OT involve the transition from the leadership of Moses to the leadership of Joshua (Numbers 27:12-23) and the transition from the prophetic ministry of Elijah to that of Elisha (2 Kings 2:1-15).¹⁹ In both of these cases the mission started by the first prophet is completed by his successor.²⁰ Moses' mission to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land is only fulfilled in the ministry of his successor

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 194

¹⁹ Leithart 2000b, 170-171, and Durham & Porter 1970, 119-121n62 observe some of the parallels between Moses and Joshua and Elijah and Elisha.

²⁰ Joshua's succession from Moses is presented as a prophetic succession in Sirach 46:1.

Joshua. Similarly, the mission that Elijah is charged with in 1 Kings 19:15-17 is only completed in the ministry of Elisha (2 Kings 8:13; 9:1-3).²¹

Elisha is a new Elijah (2 Kings 2:15), just as Joshua is a new Moses (Numbers 27:20; Joshua 1:5).²² The parallel between the ministries of Joshua and Elisha and the ministry of Jesus' disciples is worth highlighting. Both Joshua and Elisha serve as apprentices to prophets, whose ministries they inherit following the time of their masters' departures. The same pattern holds in the case of Jesus' disciples: having left their work to follow Jesus as disciples, they receive their master's Spirit following his departure and continue his mission.²³

The relationship between the prophet and his apprentice is akin to the relationship between a father and his son. In Numbers 13:16 we see that Joshua's name was given to him by Moses. Moses also lays his hands on Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9) in a manner reminiscent of the patriarchs' blessings on their sons (Genesis 48:13-20). A similar relationship exists between Elijah and Elisha. Elisha receives a 'double portion' (פִּי-שְׁנַיִם) of Elijah's spirit, the inheritance appropriate to the firstborn (Deuteronomy 21:17),²⁴ and, as Elijah is taken into heaven, Elisha addresses him as his 'father'. Jesus' farewell discourse and blessing of his disciples (Luke 24:51) belongs within this pattern of prophetic succession.

²¹ Leithart 2006, 213

²² Leithart 2000b, 108

²³ Leithart 2006, 171

²⁴ Elisha is thus given the pre-eminent position among the 'sons of the prophets' (*Ibid*, 173; Moberly 2006, 134-135).

Zwiep notes the parallel between the stress on the visibility of the master's departure in both the account of Elijah's rapture and that of Jesus' ascension.²⁵ Seeing Elijah taken up was an indispensable condition for Elisha's right to succeed him. Moberly explains the logic of the test: '...it is the responsibility of the prophet to be able to see God, and if Elisha cannot see God in this critical instance, then he is not able to take on the role of one who sees God in other instances; Elisha cannot be a prophet like Elijah unless he has the requisite spiritual capacity.'²⁶ The Lukan stress on the disciples' witnessing of Jesus' ascension might serve to underline their suitability for prophetic office.²⁷

Elijah and Moses typology is multilayered within the Lukan literature. However, in the critical movement in the narrative with which we are concerned, the disciples are typologically related to Joshua and Elisha. As their

²⁵ Zwiep 1997, 116, 194. Observe the repeated use of verbs of visual perception in Acts 1:9-11.

²⁶ Moberly 2006, 135

²⁷ Johnson 1992, 31. The encounters with the risen Christ as recorded by the gospels might also be worth considering in this context. Delayed recognition of—or failure to recognize—the risen Christ is a recurring feature in the post-resurrection narratives (Matthew 28:17; Luke 24:13-35; John 20:14-18; 21:12; cf. Mark 16:12). The liturgical structure followed by the Emmaus road account of Luke 24:13-35 (Wright 2003, 659-660), accompanied by the disciples' initial failure to recognize their companion on the road, might suggest that, although firmly embodied and visible as such, the identity of the body of the risen Christ is something that can elude mundane perception (although see the discussion of this in Davis 2006, 129ff) and is only truly accessible to those granted spiritual vision (Balthasar 2000, 218-219).

master departs, they will inherit his Spirit and continue his mission. The Spirit that the disciples will receive is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit that supervised and empowered his own mission.²⁸

²⁸ Congar 1983, 45.

2

ACTS 2:1

Καὶ ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς πεντηκοστῆς ἦσαν πάντες ὁμοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό.

In setting the scene for the events of Pentecost, Luke immediately draws our attention to the fact that all of the disciples are assembled together in one place (ἦσαν πάντες ὁμοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό). Remarking on the ‘togetherness’ of the disciples, Richard Thompson observes:

Although Luke does not explicitly state why this corporate quality is important or how these believers concretely demonstrate such a quality, such an emphasis suggests that this characteristic is critical both to the narrative and potentially to what follows.²⁹

What are we to make of the corporate character of the events of Pentecost?

²⁹ Thompson 2006, 38

A Community of Prophets

Pentecost (re)constitutes the community of the early church in a powerful way, representing an event of decisive importance for its formation and identity. For this reason it is perhaps significant that we find a number of possible echoes of the events of Sinai in the immediate context. Sinai was an event of immense importance for Israel in its life as a nation, being the occasion of a group theophany, their reception of the Torah and their entrance into a covenant with YHWH. Kenneth Litwak writes:

There are several striking elements which suggest that Luke shaped his account on the basis of the Sinai tradition. Acts 2 opens with a theophany, which includes fire and a loud sound (Acts 2.1-4; cf. Exod. 19:16 [sound of a trumpet] and Exod. 19.18 [YHWH descended upon Sinai in fire]). At Sinai God spoke to Moses, and in Acts 2.11 the people hear the disciples speaking of the mighty works of God. On a broader level, the theophanic event in Acts 2.1-4 is formative for the first followers of the Way, just as the Sinai theophany was formative for God's people in Exodus.³⁰

³⁰ Litwak 2005, 165-166. Stronstad 1999, 58-59 highlights a number of further common features of the Sinai and Pentecost narratives, including the days of preparation and the occurrence of the theophany in the morning.

In Exodus 19:1 we read that the children of Israel arrived at Sinai three months after leaving Egypt, where, after a few days of preparation, they received the Law. As the feast of Pentecost occurred 49 days after the Feast of Firstfruits (Leviticus 23:15-16), which took place in the latter half of the first month, the possibility of a chronological connection between Pentecost and the giving of the Law and forming of the covenant in Sinai is raised.³¹ This connection did not go unnoticed by the rabbis, who identified Pentecost as the feast celebrating the gift of the Law.³² Whether such a connection was established by the time that Luke wrote the account of Acts 2 is uncertain and continues to be a matter of debate among scholars.³³

Taken by itself this connection between Pentecost and Sinai may appear rather slight, but it is given more weight when we consider it alongside the presence of the other echoes of the Sinai account in the early chapters of Acts.³⁴

³¹ A number of writers reference *Jubilees* 6:17-21 in this context (e.g. Hovenden 2002, 78; Bruce 1965, 54n5). Hovenden observes the connection that *Jubilees* draws between Pentecost and covenant renewal (see also Charlesworth 1985, 2:67n).

³² E.g. Witherington 1998, 130-131; Johnson 1992, 45-46; Wall 2002, 54; Hovenden 2002, 77ff; Marshall 1980, 68; Berends 1998.

³³ Keener 1997, 193 counsels against placing too much weight on the possibility of a connection between the two events in the mind of Luke, as does Dunn 1975, 139-141. Wall 2002, 54 and Johnson 1992, 46 both raise the possibility that the connection between the two events may have been one made by Luke himself.

³⁴ Besides those already mentioned, there are a number of further echoes of Sinai narrative in Acts 2. The ascension of Christ into the cloud (Acts 1:9) might be an echo of the ascension of Moses onto

At Sinai Israel was set apart as a ‘kingdom of priests and a holy nation’, giving the children of Israel a special role to play within God’s purposes for the wider creation. The parallels to the event of Sinai are important chiefly on account of the way in which they frame the event as one through which the disciples are set apart as a people with a new vocation.

In contrast to the examples of prophetic succession that we previously observed, the example of Sinai involves the reconstitution and setting apart of a whole people and not just of one person. The events of Pentecost are not of mere private significance to those involved, but herald the establishing of a new reality in the realm of history. Sinai inaugurates a new era and not merely a period of leadership limited by one man’s lifespan. Consequently, the event of Sinai has much light to shed on Luke’s account of Pentecost. Stronstad writes:

...[W]hat is happening on the day of Pentecost is not only as dramatic as, but also as significant as what

Mount Sinai. The number added to the church (*κατενύγησαν τὴν καρδίαν*) in Acts 2:41 may also echo the number slain by the sword at Sinai (Exodus 32:28). Wedderburn 1995 argues for a connection between the events of Sinai and those of the Day of Pentecost as they are recorded in Acts, but claims that this connection was not made by Luke, but by some of his sources. Hovenden 2002, 77ff has a very helpful discussion of some further possible literary connections, including that of a Lukan allusion to Psalm 67:19 (LXX) in Acts 2:33 (see also Litwak 2005, 166), a verse applied to Moses at Mount Sinai by some of the rabbis. Johnson 1992, 46 highlights the similarities between the statement concerning Moses in Stephen’s speech in Acts 7:38 and that of Peter concerning Jesus in Acts 2:33.

happened at Mt Sinai. In other words, the creation of the disciples as a community of prophets is as epochal as the earlier creation of Israel as a kingdom of priests.³⁵

The Distribution of the Spirit of Jesus

A number of commentators have argued for some form of connection between the narrative of Numbers 11 and that of Acts 2, a connection that can illuminate certain dimensions of the church's prophetic character.³⁶

In Numbers 11 Moses appeals to YHWH to ease the burden of leadership that he is bearing. Responding to his plea, God instructs Moses to gather seventy of the elders of Israel and bring them to the tabernacle of meeting. There God will take of the Spirit that is on Moses and give it to the elders, so that they can share the task of leading the people with him.

Following a day of preparation, the elders are gathered together and the Spirit rests on them. They then begin to prophesy, although they never do so again (Numbers 11:25).³⁷ Two of the seventy elders—Eldad and Medad—were not present at the tabernacle of meeting at the time, but received the Holy Spirit nonetheless and began to prophesy in the middle of the camp. Joshua, Moses'

³⁵ Stronstad 1999, 59

³⁶ E.g. Cotton 2001; Williams 2003; Litwak 2005, 165; Estrada 2004, 210ff

³⁷ The meaning of the phrase *וַיִּסְּפוּ אֶת רוּחַ יְהוָה* is not entirely clear (Ashley 1993, 214; Williams 2003, 127-128). In light of the similar phrase used in Deuteronomy 5:22, we have opted to understand it as a denial of their continuance in prophesying.

assistant, concerned by this, asks Moses to instruct them to stop. Moses, however, was unconcerned: 'Are you jealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!' (verse 29).

There are a number of echoes of the theophany at Sinai in the account of Numbers 11, including: (1) the granting of a new vocation to a body of people (Exodus 19:5-6; Numbers 11:16-17); (2) the command for the people to sanctify themselves for the coming day when YHWH will act decisively (verse 18: הַתְּקַדְּשׁוּ לְמַחֵר; cf. Exodus 19:10: לֹא-אֶל-הָעָם וְקִדְּשֶׁתֶם הַיּוֹם וּמָחָר);³⁸ (3) the gathering of the people around a particular location, Mt Sinai in the Exodus account and the tabernacle in that of Numbers (Numbers 11:24);³⁹ (4) a theophany in which God comes down in the cloud and speaks with Moses (Exodus 19:9; Numbers 11:25).

Although some might argue that the 'spirit' given to the seventy elders is Moses own spirit, rather than YHWH's, a reading of Numbers 11 that understands the 'spirit' as YHWH's own Spirit seems far more satisfactory (cf. verse 29). Nevertheless, it is important that we recognize that the Spirit that is given to the seventy elders is spoken of as the Spirit that is upon Moses himself (Numbers 11:17, 25). Although we are not here dealing with a 'sacramental transfer' in which Moses is active,⁴⁰

³⁸ Ashley 1993, 212

³⁹ The possibility of the disciples being gathered around the temple on the Day of Pentecost will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁴⁰ Williams 2003, 131

Moses is seen as the one who mediates the elders' reception of the Spirit. The elders do not receive the Spirit as a direct bestowal from God, but with 'Moses as the intermediary'.⁴¹

Williams contrasts this with the case of leadership succession that occurs when Joshua receives authority to lead and the 'spirit of wisdom' through the imposition of Moses' hands (Deuteronomy 34:9).⁴² In Numbers 11 Moses does not abandon certain aspects of his leadership to others. The elders are rather empowered to help fulfil Moses' task of leading the people. Their ministry does not displace that of Moses, but involves a partaking in Moses' ministry.⁴³

At Pentecost Jesus mediates the gift of the Spirit to the church (Acts 2:33), and, much as the elders' reception of the Spirit in Numbers 11 gave them a share in the Spirit of prophetic leadership that belonged to Moses, so Pentecost brings the church to participate in the prophetic authority of Jesus, an authority that never ceases to be the exclusive possession of Jesus himself.

At this juncture a further dimension of the 'baptism' imagery (cf. Acts 1:5) may come to the fore: baptism does not merely initiate into office, it can also fulfil an incorporative purpose, bringing people to participate in the life, authority, status or privileges of another (Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:1-2; Galatians 3:26-29). Just as Israel was led by Moses prior to being 'baptized' into a

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 130

⁴² *Ibid*, 131

⁴³ *Ibid*, 132

greater union with him,⁴⁴ so the disciples were led by Jesus prior to the baptism of Pentecost. What Pentecost effected was the disciples' reconstitution as the church—the body of Christ—bringing them into a new relationship with their master. They now shared in the power of his Spirit, being bound to him by a bond of relationship far stronger than any they had previously enjoyed.⁴⁵

The temporary and unrepeated character of the elders' act of prophesying merits closer examination. While we have good reason to believe that the Spirit remained with the elders, enabling them to fulfil their role, the fact that they did not prophesy again suggests that prophesying was not necessary for this. The initial ecstatic manifestations were not normative for the ongoing performance of their duties. A similar occurrence can be found in 1 Samuel 10:10-13, where the Spirit comes upon Saul, causing him to prophesy. It is through this experience that Saul is set apart and personally prepared for leadership (1 Samuel 10:6). Apart from one other exceptional occasion,⁴⁶ we never read of Saul prophesying again. The prophecy was an effect and an authenticating sign of the Spirit's coming upon him; the continuance of the Spirit with him did not necessitate repeated occurrences of prophetic manifestations.

⁴⁴ As we shall later see, one dimension of this 'baptism into Moses' was Israel's entry into Moses' own experience.

⁴⁵ The incorporative purpose of the baptism of the Spirit is explored in such places as 1 Corinthians 12:12-13.

⁴⁶ 1 Samuel 19:21-24. This incident occurs after the Spirit has departed from Saul (1 Samuel 16:14).

There is a strong analogy to be observed between the prophesying of the elders and the glossolalia of the disciples.⁴⁷ As Dunn observes, Luke does not share Paul's sharp distinction between speaking in tongues and prophesying.⁴⁸ In his use of the passage from Joel in his sermon, Peter appears to equate the tongues-speaking of the disciples with the prophetic speech which the prophecy promises.⁴⁹ In light of this OT background, it seems that the purpose of the glossolalia in the context of Acts 2 was primarily that of serving as an authenticating sign of the Spirit's coming upon the disciples. There is no reason for us to believe that glossolalia would continue to be practiced by all of the disciples present at Pentecost.

The passage from the prophet Joel that Peter uses in his sermon is 'strikingly parallel' to the wish of Moses that all of the people were prophets (Acts 2:17-18; Numbers 11:29).⁵⁰ This connection between the prophecy of Joel and Numbers 11 is also found in rabbinic midrash texts.⁵¹ If, as Litwak maintains, the Joel prophecy provides a 'programmatic text' and lens for Luke's understanding of Pentecost,⁵² it is also a lens through which passages such as Numbers 11 illuminate the text. The 'prophethood of

⁴⁷ Estrada 2004, 216-217; Cotton 2001, 7-8. Wenham 1981, 109 suggests that we equate the two.

⁴⁸ Dunn 1975, 228. Isaacs 1976, 90-91, argues that Paul is far more wary of ecstatic phenomena than Luke is.

⁴⁹ Hovenden 2002, 84

⁵⁰ Litwak 2005, 166. Barton 2001, 95 relates Joel 2 and Numbers 11 together, claiming that Joel's prophecy 'reads almost as a fulfilment of Moses' hope expressed in Num. 11:29.'

⁵¹ Treier 1997, 18-19

⁵² Litwak 2005, 162

all believers' that is desired in Numbers, is prophesied in Joel and receives a form of fulfilment in Acts.⁵³

Perhaps we can even hear echoes of Eldad and Medad when we read of the Gentiles who received the Spirit in Acts 10. Eldad and Medad were outside of the group of elders at the tabernacle. Nonetheless, they still receive the anointing of the Spirit just as the others. In a similar manner, the Gentiles may have appeared to be outside of the gathering to which the Spirit was specially promised, but they received the Spirit in much the same way, in a sort of aftershock of the original event.⁵⁴ By giving Cornelius and his household the Spirit before they had become members of a Jewish church, God demonstrated the freedom of the Spirit and the fact that Jews and Gentiles were accepted on an equal footing.

⁵³ Stronstad 1999, 84

⁵⁴ On the question of whether there was one 'Pentecost' or many, see Dunn 1975, 136-138.

3

ACTS 2:2

καὶ ἐγένετο ἄφνω ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἦχος ὡσπερ
φερομένης πνοῆς βιαίας καὶ ἐπλήρωσεν ὅλον τὸν οἶκον
οὗ ἦσαν καθήμενοι

The context having been set in the previous verse, the events associated with the first Christian Pentecost begin in Acts 2:2. Given the significance of the event which he is recording, Luke is surprisingly economical in his account of the Day of Pentecost.⁵⁵ However, the few details that he does provide grant the narrative more than merely a measure of colour and realism. The pyrotechnics of verses 2-4 should alert us to the character of the event that is taking place. Roger Stronstad observes:

In the light of Israel's history the meaning of the first two signs, the metaphorical wind and fire would be self-evident signposts, both to the disciples and to the assembled crowd, that a theophany was happening.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Johnson 1992, 45 refers to it as 'slender and spare'.

⁵⁶ Stronstad 1999, 55

Theophany and Prophetic Call

Jeffrey Niehaus defines a theophany as ‘an actual manifestation of God’s presence’.⁵⁷ Theophanies can take many forms and are found in a variety of different biblical contexts.⁵⁸ Theophanies generally occur at critical junctures in the biblical narrative, for instance, in the context of covenant formation (Genesis 15:12-21;⁵⁹ Exodus 19⁶⁰), or in the context of the dedication of buildings for future worship (Exodus 29:42-43; 1 Kings 9:3).⁶¹

Looking at the account of Acts 2, we can see that it displays many of the characteristic features of an OT theophany. The divine initiation of the event, an important characteristic of theophanies, is quite clear.⁶² The sound as of a mighty rushing wind recalls accounts such as Ezekiel 1:4, where the sound heralds the arrival of YHWH’s ‘wind-driven cloud-chariot’.⁶³ The appearance of

⁵⁷ Niehaus in VanGemeren 1997, 4:1247. Savran 2003, 120 speaks of the importance of ‘a visual component in addition to verbal interaction.’

⁵⁸ Freedman 2000, 1298

⁵⁹ Mills & Wilson 1998, 34-35

⁶⁰ Vervenne 1996, 129ff.

⁶¹ VanGemeren 1997, 4:1248

⁶² “The designations of time (“suddenly,” ἄφνω) and place (“from heaven,” ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) highlight divine, not human, control of the Spirit’s action (Acts 1:2; cf. Acts 16:26; Luke 3:21-22).” Shepherd 1994, 160; Thompson 2006, 39.

⁶³ Kline 1980, 100-102

tongues of fire is also associated with the appearance of YHWH.⁶⁴

The event of Pentecost is presented as ‘a momentous and epochal episode in the forward movement of the history of salvation.’⁶⁵ It involves the impartation of holiness, consecrating the community of the disciples for future service.⁶⁶ An adumbrated eschatology is also present, as a number of authors have recognized, and Peter’s use of the prophet Joel makes clear.⁶⁷

Luke’s account of Pentecost bears a number of immediate similarities to various theophany narratives that we find elsewhere in the Scriptures. The elliptical and metaphorical language in which the account is framed⁶⁸ is similar to that which characterizes accounts such as those of Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 1, the visions of

⁶⁴ Cf. Exodus 19:16-19; 1 Kings 19:11-12; Ezekiel 1; Hebrews 12:18-19. Niehaus 1994 and Kline 2006, 129 suggest the presence of a storm theophany in Genesis 3:8, Kline claiming that this event is the ‘prototypical mold in which subsequent pictures of other days of the Lord were cast’. This position is critiqued by Grundke 2001.

⁶⁵ Stronstad 1999, 70

⁶⁶ Marshall 1980, 69: the verb ‘baptize’ is only employed with reference to the first reception of the Spirit. Pentecost involves the ‘initial endowment’ of the Spirit that first sets apart the disciples for their future mission.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Witherington 1998, 142-143; Bruce 1965, 68-69; Keener 1997, 195-196. Litwak 2005, 155ff argues that speaking of Pentecost as the ‘fulfilment’ of Joel 3:1-5a (LXX) is problematic.

⁶⁸ Thompson 2006, 39n37; Marshall 1980, 68; Witherington 1998, 132; Shepherd 1994, 160; Wall 2002, 54, all draw attention to this feature of Luke’s narrative. Shepherd observes: ‘as in the baptism narrative (Luke 3:21-22), the Spirit is characterized indirectly through the metaphorical description of its appearance.’

the prophets being shrouded in simile. In Acts 2 the sound from heaven is ὥσπερ φερομένης πνοῆς βιαίας; the divided tongues of the following verse are ὡσεὶ πυρὸς.

The simile-laden style that one finds in such theophany accounts almost seems to be designed to frustrate any attempt on our part to gain anything more than the most impressionistic image of the phenomena in question. The language serves as a veil, preventing our vision from fully penetrating to the divine reality that it simultaneously attests to.

Theophany and Call

Cecil Staton observes that theophanies are often associated with prophetic calling narratives,⁶⁹ and Savran argues that such call narratives should in fact be classified as a subset of theophany narratives.⁷⁰

The connection between the setting apart of prophets and the witnessing of theophanies may be closer than we might originally think. Savran's suggestion that call narratives must be read as a subset of the initial theophany narrative is significant, based as it is upon the recognition that the theme of theophany is never mere window-dressing in the context of call narratives.⁷¹ It is

⁶⁹ In Freedman 2000, 1298; Mills 1990, 908. Staton cites 1 Kings 22:19; Isaiah 6:1, 5; Ezekiel 1:1, 27-28; Amos 9:1 as examples. To Staton's examples we should perhaps add Exodus 3-4: the theophany associated with the calling of Moses is perhaps one of the most significant in Scripture.

⁷⁰ Savran 2003, 126

⁷¹ Savran 2003, 126

the experience of the theophany itself that serves to set the prophet apart.

The theophany is an event that specially privileges its witnesses and distinguishes them from others, giving them a sign of peculiar divine favour.⁷² Even when others are present, as in the case of Saul's vision on the road to Damascus, they are seen as somehow excluded from the full experience that the intended witness of the theophany is having (Acts 9:7; 22:9). The event of the theophany constitutes someone as a witness of YHWH, one who can then proceed to 'externalize' the vision in the form of prophetic testimony.

The incapacity of mundane vision to perceive accurately or safely the divine self-manifestation of theophany sets the one with the capacity to witness it apart from others.⁷³ As YHWH makes himself known to someone in a theophany, that person is given to know YHWH in a manner that most will not. The theophany marks a definitive change in the character of their relationship to YHWH, the 'singular experience' becoming 'the basis of a continuing relationship.'⁷⁴ Even were the recipient of the theophany never to witness one again, it would nonetheless mark him out from all of his contemporaries from that moment forward as one specially privileged by YHWH.

⁷² See Knight 2006, 166 on the significance of 'vision' in a non-modern cosmology.

⁷³ Although there are gradations of perception among the prophets (Numbers 12:6-8; Moberly 2006, 137-138).

⁷⁴ Savran 2003, 135

Within Luke-Acts there are at least three major theophany call narratives: Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, the Day of Pentecost and Saul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.⁷⁵ Particularly significant for our purposes is the theophany that occurred at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan.⁷⁶

The importance of John's baptism as a basis for Jesus' vocation should not be underestimated. The voice from heaven identifies Jesus as God's beloved Son and he is empowered by the Holy Spirit that descends and rests upon him.⁷⁷ The fundamental significance of the experience of Jesus at his baptism can be seen in the prominence that the event is given in all of the gospels, by the role that it plays in Jesus' defence of his authority (Luke 20:1-8),⁷⁸ and by the place that it is given within the apostolic kerygma (Acts 1:21-22; 10:36-38).

A theophanic vision of God is foundational to the ministry of many of the major biblical prophets. The vision prepares them for their mission in a number of ways, granting them the strength and resources for their task (Exodus 4:15-17; 1 Kings 19:16; Isaiah 6:5-7; Ezekiel 2:2; 3:8-9; Acts 26:17), giving them a firm awareness of

⁷⁵ The relationship between the three Lukan accounts of Saul's Damascus Road encounter is discussed in Hedrick 1981, Witherington 1998, 303ff, and Haenchen 1971, 322ff.

⁷⁶ Dunn 1975, 65 over-psychologizes the significance of this event, but he rightly appreciates the constitutive significance of the event for Jesus' vocation.

⁷⁷ The reference to the heavens being opened could be read as an echo of Ezekiel 1:1.

⁷⁸ Wright 1996, 495-497

their personal vocation (Exodus 3:12; Ezekiel 3:16-21; Acts 26:16) and loosely sketching the contours of their mission (Exodus 3:10; 1 Kings 19:15-18; Isaiah 6:9-13; Ezekiel 3:4-9; Acts 26:17-18).

At Pentecost the disciples are granted such a theophanic vision. The vision does not involve divine speech, but its significance was already articulated by Jesus prior to his ascension (Acts 1:4-8). At Pentecost the disciples are empowered for their mission, and given an authenticating sign assuring them of their vocation (as witnesses of the Risen Christ), having already been informed of the basic shape that their subsequent mission will take. The event of Pentecost will subsequently be foundational for the church's self-understanding, in much the same way as the Sinai theophany was for the children of Israel. The Pentecost theophany is the seal that God places upon the church, granting the church, like its master, a theophanic call as a firm assurance of divine approbation and its vocation. Its future ministry will spring out of this encounter.

The Filling of the House

There are differences among the commentators regarding the location where the disciples met on the Day of Pentecost. Marshall remarks: "some scholars think that they were in the temple, in view of the word 'house' in verse 2, but 'house', used on its own like this, cannot mean the temple."⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Marshall 1980, 68. See Isaiah 6:1, 4 LXX for a counterexample. Haenchen 1971, 168n1 claims that Luke always refers to the Temple

In the surrounding context of the Pentecost account, the temple seems to be the location on which most of the action is focused. As Stronstad observes

In adjacent contexts both before and after his Pentecost narrative (Acts 2.1-41) Luke reports that the disciples were continually in the temple (Lk. 24.53), and met in the temple day by day (Acts 2.46).⁸⁰

Within the early chapters of the book of Acts the temple has a central narrative function, providing a location for many of the church's activities (e.g. Acts 3:1-10; 5:42).⁸¹ Acts 5:12 suggests that the early church were accustomed to meeting in Solomon's portico (στοὰ τοῦ Σολομῶντος), which 'lay along the eastern wall of the temple precincts across the Court of the Gentiles' (cf. Acts 3:11).⁸²

Josep Rius-Camps and Jenny Read-Heimerdinger, provide a possible way to harmonize Luke 24:53 and Acts 1:13, suggesting that εἰς τὸ ὑπερῶον ἀνέβησαν οὗ ἦσαν καταμένοντες should be interpreted as a 'periphrastic phrase': the upper room is the place where the disciples

as τὸ ἱερόν, never as οἶκος. However, there are a number of noteworthy exceptions to this, including Acts 7:47 (Bruce 1965, 56n7), Luke 6:4, 11:51, 13:35 (Baltzer 1965, 272-273) and 19:46 (Stronstad 1999, 55).

⁸⁰ Stronstad 1999, 55n2

⁸¹ Fay 2006

⁸² Witherington 1998, 178. See Martin Hengel's treatment of this in Bauckham 1995, 37

'stayed waiting'.⁸³ They argue that the 'upper room' should be understood as 'a room in the Temple as a place of meeting for the community,'⁸⁴ drawing attention to the use of the term ὑπερῶον to refer to certain rooms in the temple within the LXX.⁸⁵ B.B. Thurston suggests that this upper room would probably have been built into the walls of the temple's outer court, and may possibly have been located to the east of the court of the women.⁸⁶ Such a theory would serve to illuminate certain features of Luke's narrative that might otherwise remain confusing, such as the public impression made by the sound of the disciples' tongues-speaking.⁸⁷ As Bruce observes, the temple is the most likely place for the disciples to have gathered on the day of a pilgrim feast and would also be the most appropriate location for a gathering of 3000 people.⁸⁸ Such a reading would also dispense with the need for the assumption of a shift in location part way through the narrative.

In Acts 2:2, Luke declares that house was filled with the sound as of wind (καὶ ἐπλήρωσεν ὄλον τὸν οἶκον οὗ ἦσαν καθήμενοι). Similar language is used in a number of places in the OT to refer to the glory cloud, variously described, filling the temple or tabernacle:

⁸³ Rius-Camps & Read-Heimerdinger 2004, 100-101

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 101

⁸⁵ They reference 1 Chronicles 28:11, 20 (some MSS); 2 Chronicles 3:9; Jeremiah 20:2; Ezekiel 41:7

⁸⁶ Cited in Rius-Camps & Read-Heimerdinger 2004, 101n88

⁸⁷ It is also unlikely that there would have been many private residences with rooms capable of seating 120 people.

⁸⁸ Bruce 1965, 55-56

δόξης κυρίου ἐπλήσθη ἡ σκηνή – Exodus 40:35 LXX
ἔπλησεν δόξα κυρίου τὸν οἶκον – 1 Kings 8:11 LXX
δόξα κυρίου ἔπλησεν τὸν οἶκον – 2 Chronicles 7:1
LXX
ὁ οἶκος ἐπλήσθη καπνοῦ – Isaiah 6:4 LXX
ἔπλησεν τὸν οἶκον ἡ νεφέλη – Ezekiel 10:4 LXX

In light of this background, and the association of the phenomena of the sound of a rushing wind with the glory cloud, echoes of such accounts would not seem to be far from the surface of Acts 2:2.⁸⁹

Acts 2:2 is reminiscent of Isaiah 6:4 (LXX) where, in the context of Isaiah's theophanic vision, we read: καὶ ἐπήρθη τὸ ὑπέρθυρον ἀπὸ τῆς φωνῆς ἧς ἐκέκραγον καὶ ὁ οἶκος ἐπλήσθη καπνοῦ.⁹⁰ There are a number of levels at which the text of Isaiah 6 relates to Acts. Both texts involve a theophany which sets people apart for a prophetic mission. The panoramic view that Isaiah is given of his mission in that passage is presented in a defining citation at the end of Acts (28:26-27) as congruent with the shape that the church's own mission has taken to that point. If the οἶκος of Acts 2 is indeed the temple we have a further significant connection with the account of Isaiah 6.

⁸⁹ This imagery is also taken up in Revelation 15:8. Observe the LXX's tendency to use the term οἶκος of the temple in these verses.

⁹⁰ Spencer 1997, 32. Both Bruce 1965, 54n6 and Cadbury 1928, 238 mention the possibility of a connection between Acts 2:2 and Isaiah 6:4 in Ephrem the Syrian (4th century CE).

The connection between a glory cloud theophany and the temple follows from the fact that the tabernacle/temple was regarded as the connection point between God's dwelling place in heaven and the earth (Exodus 25:21-22; Leviticus 16:2; Numbers 9:18-23; 1 Kings 8:10-13; Ezekiel 10). The presumption that any manifestation of YHWH's glory would begin from the temple or tabernacle was thus quite natural, particularly in light of the widely held belief that God continued to dwell in the temple (a belief articulated by Christ himself—Matthew 23:21).⁹¹ The disciples' gathering in the vicinity of the temple to receive the Spirit is reminiscent of Numbers 11:24. That these events should occur at the temple is also worthy of note in light of the connection that we find between prophecy and the temple elsewhere in Luke-Acts (e.g. Luke 2:27-38; Acts 22:17).

One established image of the eschatological gift of the Spirit within the OT is that of the water that flows from the temple in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:8; Joel 3:18; Ezekiel 47:1-2).⁹² The reception of the life-giving baptism of the Spirit in the context of the temple would have charged the event with greater significance, particularly when we consider the importance given to the east gate of the temple in Ezekiel's prophecy.⁹³

⁹¹ Baltzer 1965, 266-267; Taylor 1993, 153ff. We should also observe the focal role played by the temple in Luke-Acts (Baltzer 1965, 271ff).

⁹² Keener 2003, 1:725-727. Cf. John 7:38-39, which many believe connects the promised Pentecostal gift of the Spirit with the prophesied opening up of a fountain in Jerusalem.

⁹³ Bruce 1965, 56n8

Water images for the Spirit are present at a few points in the narrative surrounding the account of Pentecost, not least in the image of 'baptism' itself (Acts 1:5; 2:17, 33). The connection between the eschatological flow of living water from the temple in Jerusalem and Pentecost draws our attention to a further dimension of the event that we have not properly touched upon to this point. Unlike most of the OT events that we have already referred to, the significance of Pentecost is not to be found primarily in the event considered by itself, but in what it represents—the beginning of the outpouring of the Spirit of prophecy.

In contrast to the events of Numbers 11, there is no stemming of the flow of the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is not limited to those who immediately experienced the initial outpouring, but flows through them to others (Acts 2:38). Pentecost is a pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh, not merely on those who were assembled together in Acts 2:1.

4

ACTS 2:3

καὶ ὤφθησαν αὐτοῖς διαμεριζόμεναι γλῶσσαι ὡσεὶ
πυρὸς καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐφ' ἓνα ἕκαστον αὐτῶν,

As a primal symbol fire possesses a superabundance of symbolic associations, rendering it difficult for us to discern the particular aspects of this symbolism that come to the foreground in a given text. In determining the significance of the tongues of fire that appear in this verse, we must pay close attention to the context in which the symbol occurs and also to the non-mundane character of the fire with which we are dealing.

The divine fire occurs a number of different sorts of contexts in Scripture, behaving in a variety of ways. In certain places the divine fire is an agent of judgment and destruction (Leviticus 10:2; Numbers 16:35; Job 1:16; 2 Kings 1:9-12; Luke 17:29; Revelation 20:9). In others it is a sign of divine favour and approval of a sacrifice (Leviticus 9:24; 1 Chronicles 21:26; 2 Chronicles 7:1; 1 Kings 18:38).

The presence of divine fire is a common feature of many theophany narratives (Exodus 19:18; Numbers 9:15-

16; Deuteronomy 4:36; Isaiah 66:15).⁹⁴ In the book of Exodus, for instance, we encounter divine fire in the scene at the burning bush, in the cloud of fire (a ‘permanent epiphany’⁹⁵) that led the people and in God’s theophanic descent upon Mt Sinai. As Frank Polak observes, in these cases the fire symbolizes the presence of God less by substitution than by synecdoche.⁹⁶ Much the same appears to be the case in Acts 2, where the appearance of the fire is a visible manifestation of the Spirit’s coming upon the disciples. The reference to the appearance⁹⁷ of a non-consuming fire resting on the disciples is reminiscent of the fire in the burning bush.

The advent of God’s miraculous fire served the purpose of inaugurating the worship of the tabernacle, the Davidic altar and the temple (Leviticus 9:24; 1 Chronicles 21:26; 2 Chronicles 7:1). This inaugurating purpose of the divine fire is significant. The coming of the divine fire⁹⁸ was the sign of God’s acceptance of the people’s act of worship and a definitive seal of God’s approval upon the house that had been constructed for him. Some have suggested that the fire represented God’s presence in his house and as such was not permitted to go

⁹⁴ Jackie A Naudé in VanGemeren 1997, 1:534-535; H. Lichtenberger in Balz & Schneider 1993, 3:199

⁹⁵ Frank Polak in Vervenne 1996, 129

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 118n14

⁹⁷ As with the other manifestations in the Pentecostal theophany, we are here dealing with the appearance of γλώσσαι ὄσει πυρός, rather than with something clearly identified as tongues of fires.

⁹⁸ Closely associated with the advent of the divine glory cloud in 2 Chronicles 7:1-3.

out (Leviticus 6:12-13).⁹⁹ In the initial descent of fire from heaven, God lights the fire that will consume all future sacrifices and offerings.¹⁰⁰

A connection between the Holy Spirit and fire is drawn elsewhere in the NT, for instance, when Paul warns the Thessalonians not to quench (μὴ σβέννυτε) the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Romans 12:11 speaks of maintaining the spiritual glow (τῷ πνεύματι ζέοντες) and 2 Timothy 1:6 of 'rekindling' the gift of God (ἀναζωπυρεῖν τὸ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ). There is also the puzzling reference to baptism with the Spirit and fire in Luke 3:16, which some have taken to refer to the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.¹⁰¹

The concept of the Spirit's kindling of the church may also be present in the book of Revelation, where the seven churches are figuratively described as seven lampstands (Revelation 1:20). John speaks of ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς burning before the throne, identifying these as the τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ (Revelation 4:5). G.K. Beale conjectures that these lamps should be understood to be burning on the seven golden lampstands of the churches (1:12ff), empowering them for prophetic witness.¹⁰²

At Pentecost we witness the descent of the Spirit upon the disciples. Evoking a network of biblical symbolism,

⁹⁹ Wenham 1979, 120. The significance of the 'strange fire' of Nadab and Abihu is this connection is explored by Laughlin 1976, 561-562.

¹⁰⁰ For an alternative understanding, see Jackie Naudé in VanGemeren 1997, 1:534.

¹⁰¹ See the discussions in Green 1997, 181-182, Dunn 1998, 93ff, Keener 1997, 193, and Gathercole 2006, 161.

¹⁰² Beale 1999, 189

Luke depicts the initial kindling of the life of the Spirit that the disciples would thereafter be called to stir up and avoid quenching. Once again we see that Pentecost is an inaugurating event.

The Burning Ones

Fire is a prominent feature in biblical visions of the divine throne chariot or glory cloud (Exodus 19:18; Numbers 9:15-16; Ezekiel 1:4; 10:2; Daniel 7:9-10). As the realm of YHWH's special presence is characterized by fire,¹⁰³ the angels that serve in the heavenly council have a particular affinity to this element (e.g. Ezekiel 1:13-14).¹⁰⁴ In Hebrews 1:7, God is said to make his angels a 'flame of fire' (πυρὸς φλόγα; cf. Psalm 103:4 LXX),¹⁰⁵ and 2 Baruch 21:6 suggests that angels are formed of fire.¹⁰⁶

OT prophets were those who were summoned into the heavenly council and made participants in its proceedings (e.g. Isaiah 6; 1 Kings 22:19ff).¹⁰⁷ In being made members of the heavenly council, prophets were elevated to share the status of the angels. Such an elevation occasionally resulted in a physical transformation of the prophet, in a manner that made

¹⁰³ Cf. 1 Enoch 14:9ff

¹⁰⁴ The etymological identification of the seraphim (Isaiah 6:2) as 'burning ones' has been disputed (e.g. J.J.M. Roberts in Wood, Harvey & Leuchter 2006, 204ff; Eslinger 1995, 161n40).

¹⁰⁵ Bruce 1964, 18

¹⁰⁶ For a more detailed study of the relationship between the angels and fire, see Hoffmann 2005, 58.

¹⁰⁷ Beale 1999, 319

him comparable to the angels.¹⁰⁸ The prophet's humanity was reconditioned by the Spirit that had taken hold of him.

In a lengthy exploration of this matter, Meredith Kline notes:

By virtue of his Spirit-rapture into heaven the prophet took on the glory that diffused the heavenly court....

In becoming a participant of the divine council and a reflector of the Glory of the council's King, the prophet also became like the myriad angel members of the council, those "sons of God" who bore the image of their Creator-Lord.¹⁰⁹

Luke gives us an example of such a transformation in his description of Stephen in Acts 6:15—τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ πρόσωπον ἀγγέλου. A similar transformation can be found in Luke's account of the Transfiguration in Luke 9:29, which, like Acts 6:15, picks up the imagery of Exodus 34:29-35.¹¹⁰ Both Jesus' appearance and his clothing are transfigured, appearing like those of angels (Luke 9:29; cf. Matthew 28:3; John 20:12; Luke 24:4).

As the Spirit takes hold of him, the prophet is transformed. He can be removed from one location and deposited in another (1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16; Ezekiel 3:14-15; Acts 8:39-40). His movement is directed by the

¹⁰⁸ Hoffmann 2005, 58; Strelan 2004, 126ff. Fletcher-Louis 1997 explores some of the texts that suggest 'angelization' in some depth, focusing on Luke-Acts.

¹⁰⁹ Kline 1980, 58

¹¹⁰ Niehaus 1995, 121

Spirit (Luke 4:1; Acts 8:29), much as the movement of the living creatures of Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 1:12).¹¹¹ In the cases of Elijah and Jesus, their earthly ministries were concluded by rapture from the world in the glory chariot.¹¹² While they did not cease to be human, their lives were now lived in a new environment shared with angels, elevated above the realm of men.

In the sound as of a mighty rushing wind in Acts 2:2 we hear the advent of God's glory cloud. The tongues of fire upon the disciples are a sign of their inclusion in the heavenly council, along with the angelic host. Like the angels they can bear proximity to the divine fire, having themselves been set aflame. In witnessing the glory of God and his throne chariot the disciples are transformed, becoming like the living creatures in the vision of Ezekiel (1:13). The image of the prophet as one who burns with fire can be found in such places as John 5:35, Sirach 48:1 and Revelation 11:4.

Flaming Tongues

Luke's use of the term γλῶσσαί in describing the fire that alights on the heads of the disciples is surely not coincidental. As it is used in the immediate context of the gift of 'other tongues' (ἑτέραις γλώσσαις) in the following verse, Luke would appear to be playing on the connotations of the word.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Robson 2006, 88ff

¹¹² Kline 1980, 62-63. Bruce 1965, 40-41 argues that the cloud of Acts 1:9 probably should be understood as the cloud of the Shekinah.

¹¹³ Wall 2002, 54; F.H. Chase, cited in Bruce 1965, 55

While this particular play on the word γλώσσα may be Luke's own, the connection between speech and fire is certainly not original to him. Frequently cited to support the claim of allusions to the Sinai theophany in Luke's account of Pentecost, the relationship that Philo draws between the divine speech and the divine flame at Sinai is significant here.¹¹⁴ Divine speech is related to fire elsewhere in Scripture.¹¹⁵ The word of YHWH is spoken of as akin to fire in Jeremiah 23:29. In 2 Samuel 22:9, devouring fire is said to come from YHWH's mouth, while in Isaiah 30:27 YHWH's tongue is compared to a consuming fire.

That the descent of fire upon the disciples is a visible manifestation of the gift of the Holy Spirit's power is commonly held.¹¹⁶ The particular power of the prophet resides in his bearing of the divine word (Jeremiah 1:9-10), in his becoming an organ of YHWH's speech.¹¹⁷ The power which the Spirit gives to the church is that which is necessary for its task of witness-bearing (Acts 1:8). Consequently, the effect of the gift of the Spirit is chiefly to be seen in the empowering of the speech of the disciples. That an allusion to the organ of speech should occur in connection with the empowering fire that rests on the heads of the disciples should not be a cause of surprise.

¹¹⁴ *On the Decalogue* 33, 46. Turner 2006, 283ff; Johnson 1992, 46; O'Toole 1983, 246

¹¹⁵ Psalm 28:7 LXX: 'φωνὴ κυρίου διακόπτουτος φλόγα πυρός.'

¹¹⁶ E.g. Bruce 1965, 54

¹¹⁷ Heschel 2003, 22

The incendiary character of the words of the prophet is a recurring theme in Scripture.¹¹⁸ The word of YHWH is as fire and fire proceeds from YHWH's mouth when he speaks. As organs of YHWH's speech, the prophets also have their mouths empowered and purified by divine fire. YHWH tells the prophet Jeremiah that he has made his words on Jeremiah's mouth fire (Jeremiah 5:14). In Revelation 11:5, fire proceeds from the mouths of the prophetic witnesses.

Sirach 48:1 declares that the word of Elijah 'burnt like a torch'. Perhaps it is not without significance, given our earlier discussion of the relationship between the prophets and the angels, that the angels of 2 Enoch 1:5 are also spoken of as having fire coming out of their mouths.

The employment of the image of fire in order to describe the relationship between the prophet and the word and Spirit of God is quite appropriate. The prophet is animated by a power that originates outside him, exceeds his own strength (Jeremiah 20:9) and is driven by a will to which his own will must be conformed. The prophet must also faithfully fulfil his duty, lest his Spirit-given power be extinguished.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Beale 1999, 580-581. A broader metaphorical relationship between the tongue and fire can be seen in such places as Proverbs 16:27 and James 3:5-6.

¹¹⁹ Beale 1999, 231-232, commenting on the prophetic character of the lampstand imagery in Revelation 2:5, observes that the removal of the lampstand is to be understood as a consequence of the suppression of the Spirit's flame in the church.

In Isaiah 6:6-7, in the context of an account with a number of similarities to that of Acts 2:1-4, one of the seraphim touched the lips of the prophet with a live coal, purifying his lips for future witness. What we witness in Acts 2:3 is closely related to the account of Isaiah 6: in Acts 2 the tongues of the disciples are kindled, equipping them as bearers of the divine word.

The Resting of the Spirit on the Disciples

‘...and it sat (ἐκάθισεν) upon each of them’. Against some commentators, Luke’s, admittedly slightly awkward, use of the singular form of the verb καθίζω at this point most likely has the distributed tongues of fire, rather than the Spirit, as its subject.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, irrespective of the grammatical subject of the verb, as the tongues of fire are a manifestation of the Spirit’s presence, the tongues of fire and the Spirit are practically interchangeable as subjects of the action of resting on the disciples.¹²¹

The account of the Spirit’s coming upon the disciples at Pentecost has certain similarities to the account of the annunciation and of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. The event of the annunciation, as described by Luke, has been described as a ‘Marian Pentecost’.¹²² In both cases persons are given ‘power’ from on high.

¹²⁰ Calvin 1965, 51-52; Henry 1991, 2066. Parsons & Culy 2003, 24, observe that the form of the verb was altered to ἐκάθισαν in Codex κ and D.

¹²¹ Cf. Brock 2006, 80

¹²² Breck 1987, 152

And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come (ἐπελεύσεται) upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow (ἐπισκιάσει¹²³) you...” [ESV] – Luke 1:35

“And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” – Luke 24:49

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come (ἐπελθόντος) upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” –Acts 1:8

The parallels between the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and the disciples’ reception of the Spirit at Pentecost are even more significant, and have been commented on by a number of writers.¹²⁴ In *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, VI.3, Augustine remarks:

Therefore, when He sent the Holy Spirit He manifested Him visibly in two ways—by a dove and by fire: by a dove upon the Lord when He was baptized, by fire upon the disciples when they were gathered together.

Besides the visible nature of the Spirit’s descent, there are some further relationships between the accounts. In

¹²³ Note the use of this verb in connection with the glory cloud in Exodus 40:35 LXX and Luke 9:34 (Ferguson 1996, 38-39).

¹²⁴ E.g. Gaffin 1979, 17; Stronstad 1999, 64-65;

both instances, the reception of the Spirit occurs in the context of prayer (Luke 3:21; Acts 1:14), involves a theophany, and marks the beginning of public ministry. Shepherd observes that, in Acts 2 as in Luke 3, the Spirit is presented as a 'direct actor in the narrative'.¹²⁵

Dunn helpfully relates these three events together as three phases of a salvation-historical movement:

Luke sees history as falling into three phases—the period of Israel, the period of Jesus, and the period between the coming of Jesus and his parousia. Jesus is the one who effects these transitions, and in his own life each phase is inaugurated by his entering into a new relationship with the Spirit...¹²⁶

Dunn claims that Jesus—the 'first-fruits of the future harvest'—preceded anyone else in entering into the new age of the Spirit at the point of his baptism.¹²⁷ A similar transition can be seen in the case of Moses, in whose experience the later experience of the whole nation is pre-capitulated.¹²⁸ Moses is drawn out of the water (Exodus 2:10), spends a number of years in the wilderness (cf. Exodus 2:11; 7:7) and receives a theophany at Mt Horeb (Exodus 3:1-10). In the Exodus Moses is the agent by whom YHWH delivers his people (Isaiah 63:11-13),

¹²⁵ Shepherd 1984, 161-162

¹²⁶ Dunn 1970, 40-41

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 41

¹²⁸ On the relationship between the infancy narrative of Moses and the infancy narrative of Jesus, see Childs 2004, 20ff.

bringing them to share in the experience which Moses has already undergone.¹²⁹

The gift of the Spirit at Pentecost is a gift given by the ascended Jesus (Acts 2:33), who was the first to be baptized by the Spirit and who is qualified as Baptizer in the Spirit by virtue of his exaltation.¹³⁰ At Pentecost Jesus brings his disciples to share in his own experience. That the baptism of the Holy Spirit was ministered by the ascended Jesus highlights the fact that, despite the analogies between the prophetic ministry of Jesus and the subsequent prophetic ministry of the church, the church does not possess the Spirit in the same way as Jesus does, as the Lord of, and Baptizer in, the Spirit. The prophetic ministry of the church is a participation in the prophetic ministry of Jesus, which is both its template and its constant source.

¹²⁹ Alter 2004, 314: 'Perhaps the active form of the verb used for the name *mosheh*, "he who draws out," is meant to align the naming with Moses's future destiny of rescuing his people from the water of the Sea of Reeds.'

¹³⁰ Dunn 1970, 43

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ACTS 2:4

καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν πάντες πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις καθὼς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐδίδου ἀποφθέγγεσθαι αὐτοῖς.

The terminology of being ‘filled with the Spirit’ is found in the LXX, where it is used on five occasions.¹³¹ The artisans involved in constructing the tabernacle are all filled with the Spirit for the purpose (Exodus 28:3; 31:3; 35:31). Joshua is filled with the Holy Spirit as Moses’ successor as leader of the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 34:9). Finally, the term is used with reference to the figure of Isaiah 11:1-2. Marshall provides a helpful summary of the usage of this terminology with the NT:

This word [‘fill’] is used when people are given an initial endowment of the Spirit to fit them for God’s service (9:17; Lk. 1:15) and also when they are inspired to make important utterances (4:8, 31; 13:9); related words are used to describe the continuous

¹³¹ Stronstad 1999, 66-67

process of being filled with the Spirit (13:52; Eph. 5:18) or the corresponding state of being full (6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24; Lk. 4:1).¹³²

Witherington warns of the danger of treating such terminology in too technical a fashion, given the broad range of its usage in Luke-Acts.¹³³

In its Lukan usage, the concept of being filled with the Spirit is closely related to prophecy. On a number of occasions Luke uses 'filled with the Spirit' and other related terminology as part of his characterization of prophetic figures (Luke 1:15; 4:1; Acts 6:3, 5; 9:17).¹³⁴ On other occasions Luke uses this language as 'an introductory formula to describe a moment of prophetic inspiration' (e.g. Luke 1:41, 67; Acts 4:31; 13:9-11).¹³⁵ Marshall claims that we encounter such a usage in Acts 2:4, the glossolalia being the Spirit-inspired utterance.¹³⁶ Stronstad's suggestion that Luke also frames Peter's Pentecost sermon as a prophetic utterance is supported by Luke's repetition of the verb ἀποφθέγγομαι, previous used in verse 4, in the introduction to Peter's sermon in verse 14.¹³⁷

The 'filling' that the disciples receive at Pentecost is both an initial bestowal of the Spirit and a temporary

¹³² Marshall 1980, 69. See also Dunn 1970, 70-71.

¹³³ Witherington 1998, 133

¹³⁴ Stronstad 1999, 67

¹³⁵ Stronstad 1999, 67; Dunn 1970, 71

¹³⁶ Marshall 1980, 69

¹³⁷ Stronstad 1999, 67-68; Litwak 2005, 160-161

inspiration for a particular purpose.¹³⁸ As the initial gift of the Spirit, it is also referred to as a ‘baptizing’ (Acts 1:15; 11:16): as Marshall stresses, unlike the term ‘filled’, the verb ‘baptize’ is only used in connection with the initial reception of the Spirit.¹³⁹ As in Number 11, the temporary manifestation of prophetic speech is a sign of the Spirit’s abiding anointing.¹⁴⁰

Purifying the Lips of the Nations

The echoes of the OT account of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) in Acts 2 have frequently been commented upon, many seeing in the account of Pentecost ‘the old language-based division of humanity’¹⁴¹ established at Babel being overcome, the ‘unbabbling of tongues’.¹⁴² Wedderburn objects to this reading in light of the fact that Acts 2 ‘does not describe a reversion to a single, universal language as one might expect if this symbolism were intended.’¹⁴³

In Isaiah 19:18, it is prophesied that five cities in Egypt will speak the ‘language (לִשׁוֹן) of Canaan’. Although more recent commentators tend to interpret this as a

¹³⁸ For the connection between the filling of houses and the filling of persons (cf. Acts 2:2, 4), see Kline 1980, 45-46.

¹³⁹ Marshall 1980, 69; Bruce 1965, 56

¹⁴⁰ Bruce 1965, 56

¹⁴¹ Scott in Ådna & Kvalbein 2000, 105

¹⁴² Hovenden 2002, 86. See, for example, Calvin 1965, 51; Scott in Ådna & Kvalbein 2000, 105; Wall 2002, 55n94 and Jeffrey 1992, 599. Davies 1952 highlights some of the verbal parallels between the two accounts. Hovenden 2002, 86-88 questions the strength of the case for Babel allusions in the account of Pentecost.

¹⁴³ Wedderburn 1995, 32n14

reference to the Hebrew language (or Canaanite languages more generally),¹⁴⁴ a number of commentators in history have favoured a more metaphorical reading of the phrase, understanding it in terms of the language of true worship.¹⁴⁵ In commenting on Acts 2:3, Calvin writes:

These cloven tongues made every man speak the language of Canaan as Isaiah foretold (Isa. 19.18). For whatever language they speak they all with one mouth and one Spirit call upon the same Father in heaven (Rom. 15.6).¹⁴⁶

A related passage can be found in Zephaniah 3:9, which speaks of God's restoration of a 'pure lip (שִׁפְהָ)' to all of the nations, generally understood to refer to a re-establishing of the unity of the nations in true worship.¹⁴⁷ Others have explicitly connected this prophecy with the events of Babel and Pentecost.¹⁴⁸

The argument for such a connection between Zephaniah 3:9 and Acts 2 may be strengthened by the quotation of Joel in Peter's sermon:

¹⁴⁴ Block 1984, 327; Seitz 1993, 151

¹⁴⁵ Brueggemann 1998, 162; Alexander 1848, 331; Hengstenberg *n.d.*, 490; Young 1969, 35; Keil & Delitzsch 1986, 362; Henry 1991, 1113. Oswalt 1986, 376-377, seeks to sidestep the issue.

¹⁴⁶ Calvin 1965, 51

¹⁴⁷ Achtemeier 1986, 82-83; Ross 1981, 120; Calvin 1986, 284-285

¹⁴⁸ Ross 1981, 120; Achtemeier 1986, 83. Ehud Ben Zvi 1991, 225-226 questions claims of strong echoes of Babel and also cultic understandings of this expression.

καὶ ἔσται πᾶς ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου
σωθήσεται – Joel 3:5a LXX

ὅτι τότε μεταστρέψω ἐπὶ λαοὺς γλῶσσαν εἰς γενεὰν
αὐτῆς τοῦ ἐπικαλεῖσθαι πάντας τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου τοῦ
δουλεύειν αὐτῷ ὑπὸ ζυγὸν ἕνα – Zephaniah 3:9a LXX

καὶ ἔσται πᾶς ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου
σωθήσεται – Acts 2:21

The restoration of a pure lip or speech¹⁴⁹ to the nations will enable them to invoke the name of YHWH aright. Although ‘calling on the name of the Lord’ in the context of Acts 2 is generally understood in the narrower sense of seeking deliverance,¹⁵⁰ the broader sense that the language has elsewhere in Scripture (e.g. Genesis 4:26; 12:8; 2 Kings 5:11; Acts 9:14; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Timothy 2:22) is not necessarily absent.¹⁵¹ At Pentecost God takes up the languages of the nations by his Spirit, making possible truly worldwide worship. As such it is an event in which we can discern echoes of the prophecies of Isaiah 19:18 and Zephaniah 3:9.¹⁵²

There is a strong relationship between prophecy and worship in the context of Luke. In Luke the prophet is the true worshipper and Spirit-inspired speech is

¹⁴⁹ Roberts 1991, 219 claims that Zephaniah 3:13 serves to explicate 3:9. Ben Zvi 1991, 226 suggests Psalm 15 as a parallel text. The connection between mouths purged from deceit and cultic worship can be seen in Revelation 14:5.

¹⁵⁰ E.g. Marshall 1980, 74

¹⁵¹ See Hurtado 2005, 197-200, for a discussion of early Christian usage of such language with reference to Christ.

¹⁵² Robertson 1990, 328-329

frequently presented as the speech of worship (Luke 1:64, 67-79; 2:25-32, 36-38; 10:21-22). In Acts 2 that which is spoken in tongues is 'the wonderful works of God' (verse 11: τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ θεοῦ).¹⁵³ It is as God makes tongues glad (cf. Acts 2:26) that true worship will be rendered. In ancient Jewish mysticism, the visionary who ascended into God's presence was often permitted to participate in the angelic hymns, 'speaking in the diction (לשון) appropriate to the level of ascent.'¹⁵⁴ The Spirit-transformed tongues of Acts 2 can be seen as the tongues of prophets, who have been granted to join with the angels in their worship.¹⁵⁵

Robert Zerhusen presents a strong case for understanding the groups mentioned in Acts 2:5-13 as ethnic, rather than linguistic, groupings.¹⁵⁶ Most of the people mentioned in these verses would have been fluent in Aramaic and Greek. Zerhusen argues that the account of Pentecost needs to be understood in light of a diglossic language situation, in which the Judean community functioned with Hebrew as its 'high' language and Aramaic and Greek as its 'low' languages.¹⁵⁷ The ἑτέραις

¹⁵³ Cf. Acts 10:46; 1 Corinthians 14:2

¹⁵⁴ Bockmuehl 1990, 169

¹⁵⁵ We find a passage with a number of similar features (the coming of the glory cloud to Mount Zion) in Revelation 14, with a reference to a song of worship that no one could learn except the 144,000.

¹⁵⁶ Zerhusen 1995; Porter 2000, 28; Crystal 1998

¹⁵⁷ David Aaron (in Neusner & Avery-Peck 2000) claims that 'the notion that Hebrew is a holy language is found among Jews of every era' (268), going on to observe that

γλώσσαις of verse 4 are thus languages other than the 'holy' language of Hebrew. The significance of Pentecost was to be seen in the prophetic use of low languages in the temple context.

Whether or not we choose to adopt Zerhusen's rather radical diglossia thesis, the issue that he raises is an important one. The religious priority of Hebrew was a position that was most likely widely held in Jesus' day, being based in part on readings of the narrative of the early chapters of Genesis.¹⁵⁸ For those who believed that all languages apart from Hebrew resulted from the curse at Babel, the divine inspiration of people speaking languages other than Hebrew may well have been shocking. Understanding such an occurrence against the background of the prophecies in Isaiah and Zephaniah mentioned above, we can provide an answer to Wedderburn's objection: Babel is reversed, not by the return to a universal language, but by the purification of all languages for prophetic utterance.¹⁵⁹

By relating to their language as holy, Jews transformed Hebrew into a kind of ritual object, parallel, in many ways, to the Torah scroll itself. In this sense, Hebrew is part of a religious system. (268)

¹⁵⁸ Kugel 1998, 235-237 observes that the view that Hebrew was the primordial language, lost at Babel and later taught to Abram by God, was held by many Jews and Christians in the early centuries C.E.

¹⁵⁹ Jordan 1996

Acts 2 and the Prophetic Speech Impediment

Highlighting a common feature of many prophetic call narratives—the identification of an impediment and God’s encouragement or rectification of the impediment—Daniel Fredericks suggests that the call of Ezekiel can also be seen to manifest this pattern.¹⁶⁰ Detailing some of the weakness of previous explanations given for the ‘cumbersome’ grammatical style of the opening chapter of Ezekiel, he proposes that we understand it as an expression of Ezekiel’s own awkward vernacular speech.¹⁶¹ Ezekiel’s impediment of speech (cf. Exodus 4:10; Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 1:6) is rectified by his swallowing of the scroll of divine revelation in 3:1-3.

The contorted grammar and style of chap. 1, then, is perhaps a rhetorical prop that gives the book a context in which to elevate and authenticate a prophetic message that transcends any “deep-lippedness” or “heavy-tonguedness.” A cultic message must only be conveyed in the proper literary language. Eloquence is everything.¹⁶²

Ezekiel is sent primarily to the elite of Judah, who would expect a prophet to adopt a more elevated style of speech.¹⁶³ The agrarian population would have been less

¹⁶⁰ For the following see Fredericks 1998.

¹⁶¹ Fredericks 1998, 192

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 196

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 198

offended by a prophet who spoke in a vernacular dialect.¹⁶⁴ Fredericks concludes:

What appears to be happening in Ezekiel 1-3 is a reaffirmation of an official, literary language that tolerates no deviance from the norm.¹⁶⁵

In light of this background, the events of Pentecost (which, as we have already observed, echo those of Ezekiel 1-3 in a number of respects) appear all the more startling. God prepares the lips of his prophets, but what they utter is not the elevated, literary Hebrew, but ‘deep-lipped’ and ‘heavy-tongued’ common dialects. Pentecost thus elevates the vernacular, or makes the holy tongue common to all men.

Rejection and Failure to Perceive

The theme of the rejected prophet is a recurring one in the context of Luke-Acts. Marguerat observes that the rejection of Jesus in Luke 4 ‘confirms ironically his status as a prophet.’¹⁶⁶ The rejection of the early church and its message proved that it stood in line with the prophets and Christ (Luke 6:22-23).¹⁶⁷ In Acts 2:13 we see an initial

¹⁶⁴ Fredericks suggests that this is that which is referred to by the phrase לְשׁוֹן אֲנָכִי in Ezekiel 3:5-6 (cf. Exodus 4:10: לְשׁוֹן אֲנָכִי (כִּי כְבֹד־פֶּה וְכֹבֵד)).

¹⁶⁵ Fredericks 1998, 198-199

¹⁶⁶ Marguerat 2002, 140n34

¹⁶⁷ Samkutty 2006, 205. Stephen’s speech plays on this theme (Acts 7:9, 25-29, 35, 39, 51-53).

occurrence of this theme, when the tongues-speaking of the disciples is met with derision.

The rejection of the prophet is frequently foretold in the context of prophetic call narratives (Exodus 4:21; Isaiah 6:9-10; Jeremiah 1:19; Ezekiel 3:7). The significance of this theme in the context of Luke-Acts is underlined by Luke's citation of Isaiah 6:9-10 at the conclusion of Acts, in a section that has been described as 'a clue to understanding the whole of Luke-Acts.'¹⁶⁸ Blaine Charette suggests that Isaiah 6:9-10 provides us with a framework within which we can better appreciate the purpose of glossolalia in terms of divine hardening.¹⁶⁹ Tongues-speaking in Acts 2:4 demonstrates the fact that the word of YHWH is being given in languages other than Hebrew and serves as a sign of the judgment that results from unbelief. It is a sign of the exclusion of the Jews in unbelief, a point that Paul develops in 1 Corinthians 14:21-22.

The fact that the mockers perceived tongues-speaking as drunken speech suggests a number of further scriptural resonances. Isaiah 28:11-12, verses that Paul uses in his teaching on the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:21), originally occur in a context where the themes of

¹⁶⁸ Moyise & Menken 2005, 95; Charette 2005, 182. For discussion of Luke's use of Isaiah 6:9-10 in this context see Litwak 2005, 183ff, Witherington 1998, 803ff and Moyise & Menken 2005, 95ff. Moyise wonders whether Luke's wish to save the full force of the Isaiah quotation to the end of his two-volume work explains his failure to give it as prominent a place within his gospel as it is given in the others (Moyise 2001, 57-58).

¹⁶⁹ Charette 2005, 184

prophecy, drink and lack of spiritual perception are prominent (Isaiah 28:7-8). Peter Leithart has also highlighted the possibility of a connection between Acts 2:13 and 1 Samuel 1:13-14, where Eli's accusing Hannah of drunkenness is a sign of his loss of spiritual perception.¹⁷⁰ In light of the contrast between being filled with wine and being filled with the Holy Spirit that occurs elsewhere in the NT (Ephesians 5:18), there is also the possibility that Luke wishes to use the theme of drunkenness to introduce an element of irony to his account.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Leithart 2000a. There are also a number of suggestive parallels between the account of 1 Samuel 1 and the account of Luke 1 that could be explored.

¹⁷¹ In 1 Samuel 1 the theme of wine is also exploited to highlight the irony of the situation. Eli accuses Hannah of drunkenness at the very moment that she is taking the Nazirite vow for her son and 'pouring out' (שָׁפַךְ) her soul to YHWH (Fokkelman 1993, 45-47).

6

CONCLUSION

I began this study by observing the intertextual relationship between the ascensions of Elijah and Jesus and the granting of the Spirit to their successors. I then proceeded to examine the manner in which the accounts of the Sinai theophany in Exodus 19 and the participation of the seventy elders in the Spirit of Moses in Numbers 11 serve to illuminate Acts 2 as a narrative of corporate anointing. Exploring the importance of theophany in the context of prophetic call narratives, I highlighted the resemblances between Acts 2:1-4 and OT theophanies, and presented the case for a connection between theophany and temple.

In my treatment of verse 3, I studied the significance of fire as a sign of divine authorization and favour, and suggested the possibility of a symbolic connection between the tongues of fire and the empowerment of the disciples' speech. I then drew attention to the manner in which the descent of the Spirit upon the disciples at Pentecost can be understood as a consequence of the final stage in Jesus' three stage relationship with the Spirit.

My examination of verse 4 began with an exploration of the meaning of being ‘filled with the Spirit’, after which, making use of Robert Zerhusen’s diglossia thesis, I advanced an understanding of the gift of tongues as the establishment of prophetic worship in all languages. Having read Acts 2 against the backdrop of YHWH’s rectifying of the prophet Ezekiel’s common speech, I concluded by demonstrating the way in which Pentecost fits within the broader Lukan theme of prophetic rejection and failure of perception.

While many of the intertextual relationships suggested above are relatively tentative, I trust that as the case advanced by this study is tested, a number of these relationships will prove to have genuine merit and serve to provide robust support for the claim that Luke frames his account of Pentecost as a prophetic call narrative.

Given the constraints of this present booklet, I can do little more than gesture at matters that are worthy of closer consideration. Space has not permitted me to explore the significance of these themes within Lukan ecclesiology, their practical value for a modern missiology, nor even the manner in which the prophetic identity of the church should percolate into its daily life and practice. I trust, however, that I have succeeded in demonstrating the presence of themes of prophetic anointing and call in Luke’s account of the events surrounding Pentecost.

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