

The Holy Spirit empowers Church for mission & Luke's theology of mission in Acts.

By Jason Strange

October 2025

Luke's theology of mission in Acts reveals the compelling role the Holy Spirit plays in empowering, galvanising and uniting diverse believers into a new identity. Karkkainen (2002, p.30) states, "Whether speaking of an individual or the community, Luke seeks to overcome the concept of the Spirit as a power that leaps on a human being and then leaves again. In fact, the Spirit is a "feature of the age of the Church." In the build-up to this new dawn, we should not forget that in just a few weeks, the disciples went from concealment in an upper room to becoming tangible, gathered in one place, which is where matters go 'nuclear'.

Previously absent Peter, now restored, oozes ascendancy: [Acts 2: Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd. "Fellow Jews, let me explain...listen carefully to what I say." v14. "Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently..." v29. With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them...v40 NIV]. Everything Jesus foretold about Peter, this Petra, this rock and mandate: now founds in real time. Concrete connections are forged between the old prophecies of Joel and David to this new age, "...where everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Joel 2:32.

This new Church and its witness to Jesus Christ contains both Jews and Gentiles. It is destined for evangelistic witness, made fervent by participating in the blown open supernatural spirit realm. Keener, (2020, p.32) frames it nicely, "God's Spirit leads our witness. This is a major emphasis of the Pentecost story: We witness for Christ, and we depend on God's power to make our witness effective." Luke's book of Acts is not primarily a book about the actions of people, now drawn from more variegated demographics, but it charts how God shapes the new enterprise. In Acts 13, the church does not just worship, instead they act on what the Lord's leading. The Spirit of God leads them to send Barnabas and Saul, to take the gospel to places never previously conceivable. Pinnock (1996, p.116) remarks, "...Pentecost offered the Spirit a unique opportunity to work freely. Here is a community open to God's love...new possibilities have arisen for the Spirit because of the participatory journey of Jesus Christ."

. Now the Gospel is for all people, controversially even gentiles, as evidenced through the conversion of Cornelius. The Holy Spirit ignites once static hearts, leading mere mortals into overcoming social and ethnic constraints to become unified in ways previously inconceivable.

New spiritual beginnings give rise to new gifts: speaking in tongues, prophesy and perhaps a more discerning spirit? These tools are fashioned to enable the Universal mission yet are subject to a more sagacious integrity for the group moral compass. Holiness demands congruence which can lead to death for unsuspecting opprobriousness, as evidenced in the death of Ananias and Sapphira. Corporate Church now bears interdependence that will not be dishonoured. God's abhorrence of sin and each public lesson, illustrates how hypocrisy, like that of the Pharisees previous, is no longer tolerated. Perhaps the proximity of God's spirit poured out to the faithful, denotes an even heightened requirement for corporate purity. Either way, "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events." Acts 5:11.

No longer is it enough to just believe. No, the new currency is to act boldly along the new frontiers of missionary journey. Zeal is met with persecution; Evangelism attracts floggings or imprisonment. Forgiveness of sins and justification through belief in Jesus is paramount to the core message. Christ Crucified is the gateway to the Holy Spirit, transforming laity into proselytes. Pinnock (1996 p. 116) observes, "...the power of suffering love, which does not remove our weakness or eliminate pain...are clarified by the cross, the power of suffering love by which Christ overcame the world." Luke includes plentiful accounts of suffering throughout Acts including, martyrdom, floggings, imprisonment, persecution, stoning, riots and everything in between. Yet in response, the suffering prompts faithful witness, demonstrations of love and unity and a palpable prayer for persecutors, the likes of which perhaps, was not previously evident in the disciples. Stephen for example as he was being stoned, prayed to God to not hold this sin against his persecutors. The juxtaposition to Peter's sword wielding in Gethsemane is stark. Stott (1996 p. 238) reminds us that,

"God Himself is the chief evangelist...It is He who anoints the messenger, confirms the word, prepares the hearer, convicts the sinful, enlightens the blind, gives life to the dead, enables us to repent and believe...the Holy Spirit's main preoccupation is to glorify Jesus Christ by showing Him to us and forming Him in us."

Luke comprehensively bears witness to how all three of the Godhead identify themselves to us and through us. Their unique identities and roles point to one another, dovetail with one another and systematically draw from those who believe, an identity or higher caller: once laid dormant, now exemplified. The Holy Spirit makes the difference: What was once concealment, pride, fear, weakness and obscurity in even the sincerest follower - transfigures into a slick, audacious, loving, sacrificial and powerful conduit for salvation. Along the expanse of the then, Roman road network, with all those miracles to boot, not bad timing really.

Bibliography:

Keener (2020) *Gift & Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today*, chapter 3 'The Spirit empowers us for evangelism'

Kim (2007) *The Holy Spirit in the World*, chapter 2, 'The Spirit in the Bible: Pentecost, Christ, Creation'

Karkkainen (2002) *Pneumatology*, chapter 2 'Biblical perspectives on the Spirit'

Pinnock (1996) *Flame of Love. A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, chapter 4 'Spirit & Church'

Stott Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents for the Lausanne Movement, Eerdmans, 1996, p. 238.