

The Holy Spirit in Luke - Acts

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The Holy Spirit in Luke - Acts

14 And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit; and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district.

15 And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all (Luke 4:14-15 NAS).

In this passage from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus Christ has just returned victorious from the temptation in the wilderness. Now Jesus begins His public ministry, choosing Galilee as His inaugural mission field. As one reads this excerpt, a question that might come to mind is, what does the phrase "power of the Spirit" really signify?

First, a look at the Greek word translated as "power" in Luke 4:14. One of the obstacles encountered in translation is that the "parallel" word in another language may not properly convey the original dynamism. The Greek word rendered as "power" is *dunamis* which is the root for the English word "dynamite." The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible relates the meaning of *dunamis*: ". . . power, especially inherent power. All the words derived from the stem *duna-* have the basic meaning of being able, capable . . ." (Zodhiates 1684).

Hayes' Introduction to the Bible shows that this passage of Luke 4:14-15 marks a significant pivotal point in the epic of the Bible. Hayes deems Luke 4:14-15 so critical to the Bible that he appraises it as "the midpoint of history" (371). Hayes promotes a chronological succession of three important eras depicted in the Bible. The presence of the Holy Spirit is increasingly significant in the last two of these eras:

The author of Luke-Acts divided the history of Salvation into three main epochs. The first was the time of Israel and the Jews, which came to an end with John the Baptist. This epoch was characterized by the use of the Law and the Prophets (see Luke 16:16). The second period was the time of Jesus, the midpoint of history when Jesus worked through the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14). The third epoch was the time of the church when the activity of the Spirit worked through the Christian community and its leaders (Hayes 371).

A detailed examination of the workings of the Spirit in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts will reveal much about the nature and power of the Spirit. The ministry of the Spirit has undergone a significant transition over time. The New Bible Dictionary says, Admittedly, it is easier in the Old Testament to interpret the activity of the Spirit in an impersonal way than it is in the New Testament; but in both God is personally and powerfully present in His Spirit. In each Testament there is a movement from the more external to the more internal work of the Spirit and from what might be called "outward application" to inward appropriation (531).

The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are companion volumes, written by the same author, and are sequential in nature (Hayes 370). Both books are addressed to the same entity, "Theophilus," evident respectively in Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1. The Gospel of Luke narrates the life of Jesus Christ while the Book of Acts records the history of the newly formed Christian church.

The predominant early Christian documentation strongly suggests that the author of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts is a man named Luke (NIV Study Bible 1532). Halley says Colossians 4:11 indicates that Luke is a Gentile and the only Bible author to claim such heritage (559). On Luke's qualities: "He is recognized as a man of culture and scientific education, a master of Hebraic and classical Greek. By profession, a Physician" (559).

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and the Book of Acts, "Holy Spirit" and "Holy Ghost" are used interchangeably. Luke and Acts are chosen as the primary source texts because they have the greatest number (68) of direct references (17 and 51 respectively) compared with the other Gospels. Matthew has nine references to the Spirit, Mark has five and the Gospel of John has 15. The reason the comparison of references is limited to these five books is that they are the only five books of the 27 in the New Testament recognized as historical in nature. The remaining 22 books of the New Testament are divided into Paul's epistles, general epistles and the apocalyptic writing of Revelation.

The ministry of the Spirit will be traced in basically a topical fashion throughout Luke-Acts. The Bible immediately introduces the reader to God the Holy Spirit. In the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, the Spirit is already at work in the world (Genesis 1:1-2).

The deeds of the Holy Spirit as recorded in the Bible are far too numerous to mention here. The Spirit works throughout the history detailed in the Bible. In the final chapter of the Book of Revelation, the sixty-sixth and last book of the Bible, the Spirit is still found to be exhorting the unbeliever to respond to the Gospel (22:16-17).

Luke follows a form subsequently evident in the canon and makes reference to the Spirit in the first and last chapters of Luke (1:15; 24:49) and in the first and last chapters of Acts (1:5-6,9; 28:25). According to the NIV Study Bible, several references in the New Testament suggest that Luke was a companion of the Apostle Paul (1532). These are Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16; Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24. The Apostle Paul wrote 13 of the 27 books canonized in the New Testament. Examining Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible reveals that Paul makes at least 95 direct references to the Spirit in his epistles; from Romans through Philemon. It has been demonstrated that Luke was a fellow worker with the Apostle Paul. It is quite likely that Paul's recognition of the essentiality of the Spirit in the life of the Christian believer significantly influenced the writings of Luke.

The Christian community perceives the God of Israel to exist in three distinct persons of God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit. Dr. Charles C. Ryrie, retired Professor of Systematic Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, says Matthew 28:19 is the outstanding Scriptural basis for the concept of the Holy Trinity (53). Luke-Acts reveal that the Spirit is in fact a separate person from God and Christ and yet has the same nature.

In *The Holy Spirit*, Dr. Billy Graham lists several attributes of the Spirit which reveal that He is a distinct person. Graham states that there are eleven qualities which indicate that the Spirit is a person. The Spirit speaks, intercedes, testifies, leads, commands, guides, appoints, can be lied to, insulted, blasphemed, and grieved (17-18). Graham submits that Scripture reveals that the Spirit is in fact God Himself (18). Six attributes support the Deity of the Holy Spirit. He is eternal, all-powerful, omnipresent, omniscient, referred to as God, and is the Creator (19).

Genesis records that the Spirit was involved in the creation of the world. Luke parallels this theme as he demonstrates the role of the Spirit in the births of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Luke 1:15 describes the angel Gabriel announcing that John the Baptist would be filled with the Spirit while in his elderly mother Elisabeth's womb.

Six months later Gabriel appears to Jesus' mother Mary and informs her that the Spirit will "overshadow" her, resulting in the immaculate conception of Jesus Christ (1:35). When the six-months-pregnant Elisabeth greets Mary, John the Baptist leaps in her womb, Elisabeth is filled with the Spirit and prophesies that Mary and her Son are blessed (1:41). Elisabeth's husband Zechariah is filled with the Spirit at the birth of John the Baptist in vv. 1:67-80 and praises God. Luke shows no restraint in revealing the significance of the Spirit in the birth events of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.

The Spirit was deeply involved in prophecy or revealing God's future plans in the Old Testament. This role continues in the New Testament. A pious Jew named Simeon is instructed by the Spirit that he would see the promised Messiah before he died in Luke 2:25-33. Simeon also prophesied in vv. 34-35 that the child (Jesus) would cause division in Israel and that His mother Mary would grieve over Him.

Jesus does not begin His ministry before two momentous events take place. John the Baptist declares in Luke 3:16 that Jesus will baptize with the Spirit. John also witnesses the Spirit coming upon Jesus at His baptism (3:22).

Immediately, Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Spirit (4:1). Jesus fasted for 40 days and faced the temptation. Jesus was not ill-equipped as verse 4:1 verifies that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (NAS). Even though Luke clearly affirms the Deity of Jesus, it is evident that as a man He required the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit. Hayes' "midpoint of history" occurs after Jesus returns from His testing. Now Jesus functions in the dunamis of the Spirit (4:14), fully equipped for the arduous ministry He is soon to undertake. Jesus begins His Galilean ministry by reading from the Scriptures in the synagogue. Jesus reads from Isaiah and pronounces His commissioning by the Spirit in 4:18-19.

Luke turns his focus on Jesus and His teachings for the next several chapters. The Gospel of Luke is divided into 24 chapters and 15 of the 17 direct references Luke makes to the Spirit are found in the first four chapters. Luke now places Jesus and His disciples in the forefront of his Gospel.

The next writing of the Spirit is found in 10:21 when Jesus rejoices in the Spirit, praising God that He has revealed His power and wisdom to Jesus' disciples. The final direct reference in Luke is found in 11:13 where Jesus exhorts His disciples to pray ceaselessly for God the Father to send them the Spirit.

Although not named directly, Luke makes one more reference to the Spirit. Jesus informs His disciples that He will send the Holy Spirit to them from heaven: "And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49 KJV).

Luke closes his Gospel leaving the reader anticipating the coming of the Spirit to the disciples. Luke has shown the dunamis of the Spirit in Christ. But Luke does not leave his reader unsatisfied. In the first chapter of Acts, Luke immediately recalls the promise made by the resurrected Jesus and states that He gave His commandments by the Spirit (1:2). Barclay notes that "Acts has been called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit" (1976, 18). Correspondingly, Jesus states that the disciples would be ". . . baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (1:5 KJV). Verse 1:8 cites Jesus instructing the disciples that they will become witnesses for the faith by the Spirit's power.

The Apostle Peter discloses that the Spirit inspired King David of Israel in writing the Psalms (1:16). Acts 2:4 marks the beginning of the church age in Christianity as some 120 disciples are filled with the Spirit

on the day of Pentecost. Peter, always failing in the Gospels, takes on a new boldness and confidence in the Spirit. Peter preaches that the prophecy of Joel demonstrates God's promise to pour out the Spirit upon believers and that amazing signs would follow (2:17-21 cf. Joel 2:28-32). Peter spoke that the promise of the Holy Spirit had been received (2:33). Therefore, Peter admonished the people to repent, be baptized in Christ's name, and thus receive the Spirit in Acts 2:38.

Peter's boldness is again evident as he addresses the Jewish Sanhedrin. But it is by a filling of the Spirit that Peter speaks (4:8). Again, Peter speaks of the Spirit inspiring David (4:25). After Peter's speech, the people pray, are filled with the Spirit and become bold witnesses for God (4:31). Later in Acts, after the apostles are imprisoned, Peter tells the Council of the high priest and the Senate that the Spirit is a witness, as are the disciples, to the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ (5:30-32). Later, Peter also preaches that God anointed Jesus with the Spirit (10:38).

The fifth chapter of Acts shows that people lied to the Spirit. A man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira lied about an offering they made. Peter told them that they lied not just to men, but to God and his Spirit (5:3-4,9).

As the early church grew, the apostles became overburdened with their ministry. They decided that they should appoint men filled with the Spirit (6:3). Stephen met their requirements (6:5). Stephen began a powerful ministry (6:8-10). However false charges, much like those surreptitiously brought against Jesus, were made against Stephen. Stephen stood before the Council and preached that they were in error; always resisting the Spirit (7:51). Angered, the members of the Council rushed to kill him. Stephen, full of the Spirit, looked up and saw the glory of God and Jesus (7:56). Stephen's brief ministry ended with the first martyrdom in the Christian church. Like Jesus in Luke 23:34, Stephen forgives his murderers (Barclay 1976, 62). Saul, later to become the Apostle Paul approved of Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 22:4, 20; 6:10).

Acts 9:17 records Paul's conversion to Christianity by the power of the Holy Spirit. A murderer of Christians, Paul became one of the greatest Christians. Barnabas, a man full of the Spirit (11:24), is sent to Paul. In 13:2-4, teachers and prophets at Antioch are instructed by the Spirit to set Paul and Barnabas apart for a ministry ordained by the Spirit. Paul, filled with the Spirit (13:9), rebukes an evil sorcerer trying to interfere with Paul's preaching on Cyprus. Paul and Barnabas are persecuted and hence return to Iconium. The disciples were filled the Spirit and joy (13:44-52). The Spirit forbids Paul and Silas from preaching in Asia or Bithynia (16:6-7).

The Spirit warned Paul that persecutions awaited him in every city (20:23). Undaunted, Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of their responsibility as overseers ordained by the Spirit (20:28). The disciples in Syria warned Paul by the Spirit not to go to Jerusalem (21:4). A prophet named Agabus confirmed that Paul would fall captive to unbelieving Gentiles at the hands of the Jews in Jerusalem (21:10-11). Earlier, the Spirit prompted Agabus to predict a worldwide famine (11:28) which occurred during the reign of the emperor Claudius. Upon arrival in Rome, Paul stated that the Spirit spoke through Isaiah concerning the unbelief of the people (28:25).

Acts reveals the miracles performed by the Spirit filled apostles. A sorcerer named Simon was rebuked for trying to bribe the apostles for the gift of the Spirit (8:14-24). Verses 15-16 show that Samaria had received the Gospel but not the Spirit. Acts 19:1-7 describes the Apostle Paul's travel to Ephesus. At Ephesus Paul encounters about 12 believers who only knew of the baptism of John the Baptist. Paul taught them of Jesus and they received the Spirit.

The Spirit speaks in 8:29, telling Philip to witness to an Ethiopian. After the Ethiopian's conversion, the Spirit miraculously transports Philip to another city (8:39). Verse 9:31 shows the Spirit comforting the ever-increasing church. The Greek word for the comfort of the Spirit is *paraklesis*, a variation of

parakalein, which means to exhort or encourage (Barclay 1974, 217-18). The Spirit gave spiritual commands for the believers to follow in 15:28-29.

Peter received a vision teaching him to accept the Gentiles. The Spirit said three men had been sent, by the Spirit, to meet him (10:19-20). The passage in 10:44-48 describes the Spirit filled Gentiles. Peter reiterated these acts of the Spirit in 11:12-18 and in 15:8-11.

Certainly, Luke-Acts have placed heavy emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is fair to say that the ministry of Christ and the church would have had far less impact on the world without the Spirit. Zechariah 4:6 says: ". . . not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (KJV). The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts concur. Barclay emphasizes: "The early Church was a Spirit-guided community" (1976, 19). Without the Holy Spirit, Luke-Acts may not even have been written.

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