



The Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts

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In studying the subject of the Holy Spirit in isolation from its full and proper context, we are of course susceptible to the danger of falsifying the subject by a distortion of proportion. That is, while our focus is on the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is not Luke's primary focus (though I would insist it is far more important for Luke than most scholars allow). To guard against this inherent danger of a distortion of proportion, I will begin by relating the subject of the Holy Spirit to Luke's primary subject, which obviously is Christology. In comparison to the other Gospels, and more so in comparison to Matthew and Mark than to John, Luke's Christology is radically distinctive. It is a Christology, for example, that reflects the resurrection-ascension-exaltation perspective of Acts. Moreover, his Christology is complemented by a pervasive pneumatology. Thus, in a way that Matthew and Mark ignore, Luke portrays Jesus as a man of the Spirit, a charismatic leader who is anointed, led, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. For Luke, in a way that is unique in the New Testament, Jesus is the charismatic Christ.

This Christological context gives Luke's pneumatology its proper context and proportion. In this third lecture I will give a synopsis of Luke's Christology as the foundation for my discussion of Luke's pneumatology that continues in the next issue of Paraclete. This approach not only safeguards Luke's proportion between Christology and pneumatology, but it will also demonstrate that the portrait Luke paints of Jesus as the charismatic Christ in the Gospel is paralleled in his subsequent portrait of the disciples in Acts. In other words, according to Luke not only was Jesus, the Founder of Christianity, anointed, led, empowered by the Spirit, but the disciples, His followers, are also baptized, led, and empowered by the Spirit. This is not surprising, for their mission is to continue to do and teach those things Jesus had begun to do and teach.

Thus, while Luke's first volume of his two-volume history of the origin and spread of Christianity narrates the story of the charismatic Christ going about and doing good, his second volume narrates the story of the charismatic community of disciples going about and doing good, for the Spirit of Christ was with them.

Synopsis Of Lucan Christology

Each of the Gospels portrays a common subject, namely, the saving ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Though what they have in common is vastly more important than their differences, each evangelist has a distinct Christology. John, of course, differs radically in his portrait of Christ in comparison to the so-called synoptic evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Nevertheless, in terms of content, emphasis, and style, even these evangelists have a distinct Christology. The evangelist Mark, for example, portrays Jesus as a man of vigorous action. In successive and increasingly significant portraits he shows Jesus, first in the role of teacher (1:16 to 4:41); then as prophet, first, to Israel (5:1-7 to 7:23) and second, to the Gentiles (7:24-37); next, as the Messiah (8:1 to 9:50); and finally, as the King of the Jews (10:1 to 16:20).

Matthew, on the other hand, emphasizes that Jesus is the King of the Jews—a royal Messiah—from the beginning of his Gospel (note the genealogy, 1:1-17, and especially the visit of the Magi, 2:1-12), and a Moses-like figure in his

ministry to Israel (for example, the Sermon on the Mount, 5:1 to 7:29, and the five blocks of discourse/teaching). Of the synoptic evangelists Luke has the most fully developed Christology, in that it is an Old Testament Christology, incarnational, and the most fully trinitarian.

Luke's Christology Is An Old Testament Christology

Luke's is an Old Testament Christology. This is a perspective he naturally shares with the other three evangelists. Nevertheless, one of the most immediate and dominant impressions of Luke's Christology is that it is massively rooted in the Old Testament. This impression is just as true of Acts as it is for the Gospel.

From the Infancy Narrative (1:5ff) that launches the Gospel narrative, to the concluding report that Paul testified to the Jews in Rome, "trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the law of Moses and from the Prophets" (Acts 28:23),¹ Luke presents Jesus of Nazareth to his readers in terms of Old Testament language and themes.

Since Luke-Acts accounts for 25 percent of the bulk of the New Testament, and also because the primary subject of this essay is Luke's pneumatology, it is impossible to do justice to this pervasive indebtedness to the Old Testament. Briefly, we note the following: Jesus will inherit the throne of His father David (Luke 1:32); He is born in Bethlehem, the city of David (2:5); and He is a Light to the Gentiles (2:32). Furthermore, He is the Servant (Acts 3:13), the Holy and Righteous One (Acts 3:14), and the stone that the builders rejected (Acts 4:11).

In addition to this general, all-pervasive Old Testament background to Luke's Christology, there is also more specifically Luke's proof-from-prophecy presentation of his Christology. This proof-from-prophecy is typified in his "it is written" formula that appears in Luke-Acts over a dozen times (Luke 2:23; 3:4, and others). Often Luke simply uses this formula independently, as, for example, when Jesus announces to the Twelve: "Behold we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished" (Luke 18:31). The three "fulfillment" verbs Luke uses—pimplemi (Luke 21:22, and others), pleroo (Luke 4:21, and others), and teloo (Luke 22:37)—complement the "it is written" formula.

Jesus' post-resurrection explanation to His disciples is the most comprehensive statement of this "it is written"- "fulfilled" relationship. "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you," Jesus reminded them, continuing, "that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). From this unfortunately abbreviated survey, it is clear that the sacred history and literature of the Old Testament both anticipates and is fulfilled in the person and redemptive mission of Jesus.

Luke's Christology Is Incarnational

Not only is Luke's an Old Testament Christology, but it is also incarnational. Although Luke and Matthew have their individual perspectives, they share this incarnational emphasis; but Mark does not, because he lacks an infancy narrative. To the virgin Mary the angel Gabriel announced: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, ... and His Kingdom will have no end" (1:31–33). Perplexed by this portentous announcement, Mary asks, "How can this be?" Gabriel answers: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Because it is incarnational, Luke's Christology is also ontological: Mary's baby Jesus will be "the Son of the Most High" and "the Son of God."

Jesus is early and uniquely conscious of this ontological reality. Thus at age 12, when His parents find their delinquent Son in the Temple after the Passover, He asks them: "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" (2:49). God is His Father; He is God's Son. This reality gives immediate significance to the voice from heaven at His baptism and subsequently at His transfiguration: "Thou art My beloved Son" (3:22; 9:35). While David's son may enjoy a father-son relationship with God by adoption—"I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me" (2 Samuel 7:14)—Jesus is God's Son through the miracle and sacred mystery of the Incarnation. Luke emphasizes this incarnational-ontological Christology by concluding Jesus' genealogy, "the son of Adam, the son of God" (3:38). In other words, as Adam was uniquely created by God, so, Jesus, the second Adam,

was also uniquely created by God.

Luke's Christology Is Trinitarian

Luke's Gospel is Christological, but it is a Christology more robustly trinitarian than that found in either Matthew or Mark. Luke's Christology is both theological and pneumatological. Many of the same texts that report the incarnational dimension of Luke's Christology also encode one (theology) or the other (pneumatology), or both complementary dimensions of his trinitarian Christology. On the one hand Luke's sonship language—"Son of the Most High," "Son of God," "Thou art My Son"—implies the fatherhood of God toward mankind in creation (Matthew 5:45), toward Israel in election (Exodus 4:22), or toward the Davidic King by adoption (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7). Since He is God's Son, He calls God His Father as a boy of 12 (2:49), at Gethsemane (22:42), in death (23:46), and in resurrection (Acts 1:4,7), a claim that is blasphemous on any lips other than His own.

Luke's Christology not only has a theological emphasis, it also has a pneumatological emphasis that is both unexpected and startling in comparison to the pneumatology of Matthew and Mark. Luke, as Matthew, reports it is by the overshadowing power of the Holy Spirit that the miracle of the Incarnation is effected. All four evangelists report the announcement of John the Baptist that his successor, in contrast to himself who baptizes only in water, will baptize in the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). All four evangelists, moreover, report the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus after He had been baptized by John (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32). The synoptic evangelists finally report that after His baptism Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1). This is the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit, which Luke holds in common with one or more of the other evangelists. That relationship which is unique to Luke-Acts makes Luke the historian-theologian of the Spirit and Jesus the charismatic Christ.

For example, Luke, and Luke alone, reports that the descent of the Holy Spirit means Jesus has been anointed by the Spirit (4:18ff; Isaiah 61:1; cf., Acts 4:27; 10:38). This anointing by the Spirit constitutes Jesus as the Messiah or Christ; indeed, the pneumatic or charismatic Christ. Moreover, Luke alone reports that, as the Anointed One, Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit when He returned from the Jordan (4:1), and that following His temptation by the devil He "returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit" (4:14). Having been anointed by the Spirit at the beginning of His ministry, He became the baptizer in the Spirit when His ministry was transferred to the disciples. In Peter's words to the crowd on the Day of Pentecost: "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

This exclusively Lucan data on the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit, coming as it does at the beginning and conclusion of His earthly ministry, brackets that entire ministry. By bracketing Jesus' ministry by these references to the Spirit, Luke informs his readers that from first to last Jesus ministers as a charismatic; that is, He is full of the Holy Spirit, He is led by the Spirit, He is empowered by the Spirit. Lest his readers miss this obvious fact Luke inserts several incidental reports to remind them Jesus is the charismatic Christ in experience. For example, when the 70 disciples return from their mission and report its success, Luke reports: "At that very time He [Jesus] rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit" (10:21). Moreover, when Luke introduces book two of his two-volume history of the origin and spread of Christianity, he reminds Theophilus "about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom he had chosen" (Acts 1,2). Finally, Luke reports Peter's witness to Cornelius and his assembled household: "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38).

From Luke's data the reader discovers, almost incidentally, that Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit, gave unrecorded orders to the apostles by the Holy Spirit, and in general terms went about doing good in the power of the Spirit. Thus Luke, as no other evangelist, compels us to conclude that the entire ministry of Jesus—all He said and did—was directed, inspired, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

To sum up, Luke-Acts presents a trinitarian Christology; that is, a Christology that is shaped, qualified, and conditioned by both theology (proper) and a unique pneumatology. Of the two, Luke's pneumatology is more dramatically prominent. Therefore, Luke's pneumatology is a dominant aspect of his Christology.

Luke's Christology Is Vocational

In addition to being incarnational and trinitarian, Luke's Christology is also vocational. In other words, Jesus, the Son of God, had a mission to perform. As in the Gospel of Mark so in the Gospel of Luke Jesus performs four successive, though overlapping, roles. Luke portrays Jesus in the role of rabbi, or teacher (4:15,31; 5:3,17; 6:6); prophet, particularly after the pattern of the charismatic prophets, Elijah and Elisha (7:16,39; 9:7-9,19; 24:19); and Messiah (9:20), which ultimately means King of the Jews (19:38; 23:2,3,37,38). As Jesus adopts each role, He advances to a new stage of His self-revelation and the offering of himself to Israel. Thus, in the same way that Luke's incarnational Christology is ontological, so his vocational Christology is functional.

This vocational-functional Christology is not limited to the Gospel but is continued in Acts where Jesus is proclaimed as the Christ (Acts 2:36, and others), the Servant (3:13, and others), the Prophet-like-Moses (3:22; 7:37), and most especially, in comparison to the Gospel account, as Lord (2:36, and others). Curiously, Peter, who first proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah or Christ, was the first to announce on the Day of Pentecost that "God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified" (2:36).

Throughout Acts, as it is never done in the Gospel except on the lips of angels (Luke 2:11), Jesus is commonly identified as Lord. Luke reports that in Jerusalem "the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (4:33). Those who are saved when the Gospel is preached are "believers in the Lord" (5:14; compare 9:35,42; 13:12, and others). Stephen, the first Christian martyr, prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (7:59), and Barnabas and Paul risked their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (15:26; compare 21:13). Ananias is sent to Saul in Damascus by the Lord Jesus (9:15-17); Apollos was "instructed in the way of the Lord; . . . teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus" (18:25). Whereas the title Christ, or Anointed One, identifies Jesus in His roles as Prophet and King, the title Lord identifies Jesus both with the God of Israel, and as a rival to the Roman lord, or Caesar. Ironically, in ancient Rome, the imperial seat of the Roman lord, for 2 years Paul taught about the emperor's rival, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ, "with all openness, unhindered" (28:31).

Endnote

1. All Scripture quotations in this article are from the New American Standard Version.

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