

THE ROLE OF GLOSSOLALIA IN LUKE-ACTS

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We Pentecostals have always read the narrative of Acts, and particularly the account of the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), as a model for our own lives. The stories of Acts are our stories: stories of ordinary people in need of God's power; stories of fishermen called to bear bold witness for Jesus in the face of great opposition; stories of peasants persevering in the midst of great suffering; stories of powerful, demonic adversaries seeking to discourage and destroy. Pentecostals the world over identify with these stories, especially since so many face similar challenges.¹ This sense of connection with the text encourages us to allow the narrative to shape our lives, our hopes and dreams, our imagination.² So, we read the stories of Acts with expectation and eagerness: stories of divine guidance offered through dreams and visions; stories of wonderful miracles bringing joy and open hearts; stories of divinely inspired perseverance in the face of indescribable suffering; and, above all, stories of the Holy Spirit's power, enabling ordinary disciples to do extraordinary things for God.

We Pentecostals have never viewed the gulf that separates our world from that of the text as large. The fusing of our horizons with that of the text takes place naturally, without a lot of reflection, largely because our world and that of the text are so similar. Whereas western

¹ One Chinese house church leader put it this way, "When Chinese believers read the book of Acts, we see in it our own experience; when foreign Christians read the book of Acts, they see in it inspiring stories." His point was clear: our experience of persecution, or our lack of it, impacts how we read Luke's narrative. On the Pentecostal orientation of the Chinese house church movement, see Luke Wesley, *The Church in China: Persecuted, Pentecostal, and Powerful* (AJPS 2; Baguio: APTS Press, 2004).

² On the role of imagination in the hermeneutical enterprise, see Joel Green, "Learning Theological Interpretation from Luke," in Craig G. Bartholomew, Joel B. Green, and Anthony Thiselton (eds.), *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation* (Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 6; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 59.

theologians and scholars of the past two centuries have exerted great energy wrestling with how to interpret biblical texts that speak of God's miraculous activity, Pentecostals have not been afflicted with this sort of angst.³ While Rudolph Bultmann developed his demythologizing approach to the New Testament,⁴ Pentecostals quietly (well, perhaps not so quietly) prayed for the sick and cast out demons. As Evangelical theologians, following in the footsteps of B.B. Warfield, sought to explain why we should accept the reality of the miracles recorded in the New Testament; but, at the same time, not expect them today,⁵ Pentecostals were (at least in our eyes) witnessing Jesus perform contemporary "signs and wonders" as he established his church.

No, the hermeneutic of most Pentecostal believers is not overly complex. It is not filled with questions about historical reliability or "outdated worldviews." It is not excessively reflective about theological systems, cultural distance, or literary strategies.⁶ The hermeneutic of the typical Pentecostal believer is straightforward and simple: the stories in Acts are "my" stories. This is not to say that Pentecostals fail to exercise discernment or judgment. After all, not all stories are filled with the exploits of heroes. There are villains and not every aspect of a story is to be emulated. However, the fact remains, Pentecostals have readily embraced the stories of Acts as "our" stories, stories that shape our identity, ideals, and actions.

I would suggest that strong arguments could be made for viewing this simple, narrative approach to the book of Acts as one of the great strengths of the Pentecostal movement. It is undoubtedly a

³ Sociologist Margaret M. Poloma notes that "Ever since the famous Azusa Street Revival (1906–1909) in Los Angeles...the Pentecostal/Charismatic (P/C) movement has battled the forces of modernity with revival fires" (*Main Street Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism* [Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press], 2003, 15).

⁴ Rudolph Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in H.W. Bartsch, *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate by Rudolf Bultmann and Five Critics* (ET New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 1-2: "The mythical view of the world which the New Testament presupposes...is incredible to modern man, for he is convinced that the mythical view of the world is obsolete."

⁵ On Benjamin Warfield's cessationist views, see Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Postbiblical Miracles* (JPTSS 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 41–111.

⁶ Although this remains true at the grassroots, there is a growing group of Pentecostal theologians and biblical scholars as evidenced by this journal. Note also the Society for Pentecostal Studies and its journal, *Pneuma*, as well as the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*.

large reason for its rapid growth around the world.⁷ The simplicity of reading the text as a model for our lives, without angst about the miraculous or how it all fits into complex theological systems, clearly enables the message to be readily grasped by people in pre- or semi-literate cultures, people that function in more experiential and less cognitive cultures. We should not forget that these people represent the majority of the inhabitants of our planet. They, too, generally exhibit little concern about stories filled with miracles, but rather readily identify with them.⁸

I am convinced that this simple hermeneutic, this straightforward approach to reading Acts as a model for the church today, is one of the key reasons why an emphasis on speaking in tongues played such an important role in the formation of the modern Pentecostal movement. Certainly the link between speaking in tongues and baptism in the Holy Spirit has marked the Pentecostal movement since its inception. Without this linkage it is doubtful whether the movement would have seen the light of day, let alone survived.

Glossolalia has been crucially important for Pentecostals the world over for many reasons, but I would suggest that two are of particular importance. First, as I have noted, speaking in tongues highlights, embodies, and validates the unique way that Pentecostals read the book of Acts: Acts is not simply a historical document; rather, Acts presents a model for the life of the contemporary church. Thus, tongues serve as a sign that “their experience” is “our experience” and that all of the gifts of the Spirit (including the “sign gifts”) are valid for the church today. Secondly, tongues calls the church to recognize and remember its true identity: the church is nothing less than a community of end-time prophets called and empowered to bear bold witness for Jesus. In short, the Pentecostal approach to tongues symbolizes significant aspects of the movement: its hermeneutic (Acts and the apostolic church represent a model for the church today) and its theological center (the prophetic and missionary nature of the Pentecostal gift). For Pentecostals, then, tongues serve as a sign that the calling and power of the apostolic church are valid for contemporary believers.

⁷ Philip Jenkins suggests that the Pentecostal movement should be identified as “the most successful social movement of the past century” (*The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 8).

⁸ On several occasions, as I have translated orally the testimonies of Chinese believers for visitors to China from Western nations, I have been tempted to tone down their references to amazing supernatural occurrences for fear that their foreign visitors might think they are crazy.

In the following essay, I would like to explore, from Luke's perspective, the role of tongues in the life of the church and the individual believer. I will first highlight the importance of starting our inquiry with the right mindset by describing the assumptions regarding tongues that should inform our study. I will then attempt to elucidate Luke's perspective on tongues, particularly his attitude toward the role of tongues in his church. Then, I shall seek to describe Luke's understanding of the role of tongues in the life of the individual believer. Finally, I shall summarize my findings and their significance for contemporary Christians.

1. Important Assumptions: Tongues or Languages?

Many Christians seeking to examine the biblical teaching on tongues begin with faulty assumptions. Chief among these would be the notion that glossolalia was either non-existent in the early church, or at the most, that it was experienced very rarely by a limited few. The teaching, prevalent in some quarters, that references to "speaking in tongues" in the NT typically denote the supernatural ability to preach in a foreign language, previously unknown to the speaker (xenolalia), has cast a long shadow. Furthermore, the impression is often given that the NT authors rarely discuss this strange practice and that, when they do, they do so with great hesitation and are largely negative and condescending in their remarks. However, a review of the biblical evidence, as we shall see, suggests that these assumptions are flawed and need to be reconsidered.

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues is actually described in numerous passages in the New Testament.⁹ In 1 Corinthians 12-14 Paul refers to the gift of tongues (γλῶσσαις)¹⁰ and uses the phrase λαλέω γλῶσσαις to designate unintelligible utterances inspired by the Spirit.¹¹ The fact that this gift of tongues refers to unintelligible utterances (e.g., the glossolalia experienced in contemporary Pentecostal churches) rather than known human languages is confirmed by the fact that Paul explicitly states that these tongues must be interpreted if they are to be understood (1 Cor. 14:6-19, 28; cf. 12:10, 30).

⁹ See 1 Cor. 12-14; Acts 2:4, 10:46, 19:6; note also Mark 16:17 and Romans 8:26-27.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 12:10; 12:28; 13:8; 14:22, 26.

¹¹ 1 Cor. 12:30; 13:1; 14:2, 4, 6, 13, 18, 23, 27, 39.

In Acts 10:46 and 19:6 Luke also uses the phrase *λαλέω γλώσσαῖς* to designate utterances inspired by the Spirit. In Acts 10:46 Peter and his colleagues hear Cornelius and his household “speaking in tongues and praising God.”¹² Acts 19:6 states that the Ephesian disciples “spoke in tongues and prophesied.” The literary parallels between the descriptions of speaking in tongues in these passages and 1 Corinthians 12-14 are impressive. All of these texts: (1) associate speaking in tongues with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; (2) utilize similar vocabulary (*λαλέω γλώσσαῖς*); and (3) describe inspired speech associated with worship and prophetic pronouncements. Additionally, since 1 Corinthians 12-14 clearly speaks of unintelligible utterances and there is no indication in either of the Acts passages that known languages are being spoken - indeed, there is no apparent need for a miracle of xenolalia in either instance (what foreign language would they have spoken?) - most English translations (including the NRSV) translate the occurrences of *λαλέω γλώσσαῖς* in these texts with reference to speaking in tongues. The Chinese *Union Version* translates in a similar fashion, using a phrase (*shuo fang yan*) that refers to regional dialects or, for contemporary Christians, glossolalia.

The references to *γλώσσαῖς* in Acts 2:1-13, however, raise interesting questions for those seeking to understand this passage. The first occurrence of *γλώσσαῖς* is found in Acts 2:3, where it refers to the visionary “tongues of fire” that appear and then separate and rest on each of the disciples present. Then, in Acts 2:4 we read that those present were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to “speak in other tongues (*λαλεῖν ἑτέροις γλώσσαῖς*) as the Spirit enabled them.” This phenomenon creates confusion among the Jews of the crowd who, we are told, represent “every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). The crowd gathered in astonishment because “each one heard them speaking in his own language” (*διαλέκτω*; Acts 2:6). These details are repeated as Luke narrates the response of the astonished group: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language” (*διαλέκτω*; Acts 2:7-8)? After the crowd lists in amazement the various nations represented by those present, they declare, “we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues” (*γλώσσαῖς*; Acts 2:11)!

Since Acts 2:11 clearly relates *γλώσσαῖς* to the various human languages of those present in the crowd, most scholars interpret the “tongues” (*γλώσσαῖς*) of Acts 2:4 and 2:11 as referring to

¹² All English Scripture citations are taken from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

intelligible speech. The disciples are enabled by the Spirit to declare “the wonders of God” in human languages that they had not previously learned. This reading of the text has encouraged the NRSV and the Chinese *Union Version* to translate γλώσσαῖς Acts 2:4 and 2:11 with the term “language” and its Chinese equivalent.

However, it should be noted that this text has been interpreted differently. Some scholars, admittedly a minority, have argued that the “tongues” (γλώσσαῖς) of Acts 2:4 refer to unintelligible utterances inspired by the Spirit.¹³ According to this reading, the miracle that occurs at Pentecost is two-fold: first, the disciples are inspired by the Holy Spirit to declare the “wonders of God” in a spiritual language that is unintelligible to human beings (i.e., glossolalia); secondly, the Jews in the crowd who represent a diverse group of countries are miraculously enabled to understand the glossolalia of the disciples so that it appears to them that the disciples are speaking in each of their own mother-tongues. Although this position may at first sight appear to be special pleading, as Jenny Everts points out, there are in fact a number of reasons to take it seriously.¹⁴

First, it should be noted that Luke uses two different terms, both of which can refer to language, in Acts 2:1-13: γλώσσαῖς (Acts 2:4, 11) and διάλεκτος (Acts 2:6, 8). The term διάλεκτος clearly refers to intelligible speech in Acts 2:6, 8 and it may well be that Luke is consciously contrasting this term with “the more obscure expression of ἑτέρας γλώσσαῖς” in Acts 2:4.¹⁵ Given the usage of the term, γλώσσαῖς, elsewhere in the New Testament, particularly when it is associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit, this suggestion is entirely plausible. Luke certainly had other options before him: he could have referred to languages in other ways, as the usage of διάλεκτος in Acts 2:6-8 indicates. However, in Acts 2:4 he chooses to use the term γλώσσαῖς, which reappears in similar contexts in Acts 10:46 and 19:6.

Second, it may well be that the phrase τῆ ἰδίᾳ διαλέτῳ (“in his own language”) modifies the verbs of hearing in Acts 2:6 and in Acts 2:8. This is certainly the case in Acts 2:8: “How is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?” Everts notes that, if we read Acts 2:6 in a similar way, “these two verses would imply that each

¹³ See Everts, “Tongues or Languages? Contextual Consistency in the Translation of Acts 2,” *JPT* 4 (1994), p. 74, n. 9 and the works she cites, the most recent being J.L. Sherrill, *They Speak with Other Tongues* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), pp. 105-106.

¹⁴ Everts, “Tongues,” 74-75. I am largely dependent on Everts for the points that follow.

¹⁵ Everts, “Tongues,” 75.

individual heard the entire group of disciples speaking the individual's native language."¹⁶ All of this indicates that Luke may not be using γλώσσαίς (Acts 2:4, 11) and διάλεκτος (Acts 2:6, 8) simply as synonyms.

Third, the major objection to this interpretation is the fact that in Acts 2:11 γλώσσαίς is used as a synonym for διάλεκτος: "we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues" (γλώσσαίς). However, it should be noticed that in Acts 2:1-13 Luke may be intentionally playing on the multiple meanings of γλῶσσα (tongue). In Acts 2:3 the term refers to the shape of a tongue ("tongues of fire"). In Acts 2:11 it refers to a person's mother-tongue or native language. Given the term's usage elsewhere in the New Testament, is it not likely that Luke intended his readers to understand his use of the term in Acts 2:4 as a reference to unintelligible speech inspired by the Holy Spirit (glossolalia)?

Fourth, this reading of the text offers a coherent reason for the reaction of the bystanders who thought that the disciples were drunk. While it is hard to imagine the crowd reacting this way if the disciples are simply speaking in foreign languages; the crowd's reaction is entirely understandable if the disciples are speaking in tongues (glossolalia).

In short, the evidence suggests that Luke's references to speaking in tongues (λαλέω γλώσσαίς) in Acts 10:46, 19:6, and quite possibly (but less certain) 2:4, designate unintelligible utterances inspired by the Spirit rather than the speaking of human languages previously not learned. The crucial point to note here is that in Acts 2:4 γλώσσαίς may mean something quite different from that which is suggested by the translation, "languages." The translation "tongues" on the other hand, with its broader range of meaning, not only captures well the nuances of both possible interpretations noted above; it also retains the verbal connection Luke intended between Acts 2:4, Acts 10:46, and Acts 19:6. Everts' conclusion is thus compelling: "There is really little question that in Acts 2:4 'to speak in other tongues' is a more responsible translation of λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαίς than 'to speak in other languages'."¹⁷

The logical corollary of this conclusion for Chinese Christians is that there is a better way to translate the λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαίς of Acts 2:4 into Chinese than the "*shuo qi bie quo de hua*"¹⁸ offered by

¹⁶ Everts, "Tongues," 75.

¹⁷ Everts, "Tongues," 75.

¹⁸ 说起别国的话。

the Chinese *Union Version*. Probably the best approach would be to translate this key expression in Acts 2:4 with the phrase, *shuo qi bie zhong de fang yan*,¹⁹ which can refer to speaking in different kinds of tongues (glossolalia), different regional dialects, or different languages. This would also preserve the connection with the *shuo fang yan* of Acts 10:46 and 19:6.

Another alternative is found in *The Today's Chinese Version* (*xian dai zhong wen yi ben*),²⁰ which translates the phrase in Acts 2:4 as “*shuo qi bie zhong yu yan*.”²¹ Although this translation has a more narrow range of meaning and refers specifically “to speaking in other languages,” it does retain a verbal connection to Acts 10:46 and 19:6 by translating λαλέω γλώσσαις in these texts with the phrase, *ling yu* (spiritual language).²² This translation is thus better than that found in the Chinese *Union Version*, but perhaps not as good as our suggested translation above.

2. Luke-Acts and the Role of Tongues in the Church

The importance of retaining the verbal connections between the γλώσσαις (tongues) of Acts 2:4, Acts 10:46, and Acts 19:6 should not be missed. This becomes apparent when we examine Luke's understanding of the role of tongues in the life of the church.

2.1 Tongues as a Type of Prophecy

A close reading of Luke's narrative reveals that he views speaking in tongues as a special type of prophetic speech. Speaking in tongues is associated with prophecy in each of the three passages which describe this phenomenon in Acts. In Acts 2:17-18 (cf. Acts 2:4) speaking in tongues is specifically described as a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that in the last days all of God's people will prophesy. The strange sounds of the disciples' tongues-speech, Peter declares, are in fact not the ramblings of drunkards; rather, they represent prophetic utterances issued by God's end-time messengers (Acts 2:13, 15-17). In Acts 19:6 the connection between prophecy and speaking in tongues is again explicitly stated. When Paul laid hands on the Ephesian

¹⁹ 说起别种的方言。

²⁰ 现代中文译本。

²¹ 说起别种语言。

²² 灵语。

disciples, the Holy Spirit “came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.”

Finally, the association is made again in Acts 10:42-48. In the midst of Peter’s sermon to Cornelius and his household, the Holy Spirit “came on all those who heard the message” (Acts 10:44). Peter’s colleagues “were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God” (Acts 10: 45-46). It is instructive to note that the Holy Spirit interrupts Peter at the moment he has declared, “*All the prophets testify about him* [Jesus] that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10: 43).²³ In view of Luke’s emphasis on prophetic inspiration throughout his two-volume work and, more specifically, his description of speaking in tongues as prophetic speech in Acts 2:17-18, it can hardly be coincidental that the Holy Spirit breaks in and inspires glossolalia precisely at this point in Peter’s sermon. Indeed, as the context makes clear, Peter’s colleagues are astonished at what transpires because it testifies to the fact that God has accepted uncircumcised Gentiles. Again, the connection between speaking in tongues and prophecy is crucial for Luke’s narrative. In Acts 2:17-18 we are informed that reception of the Spirit of prophecy (i.e., the Pentecostal gift) is the exclusive privilege of “the servants” of God and that it typically results in miraculous and audible speech.²⁴ Speaking in tongues is presented as one manifestation of this miraculous, Spirit-inspired speech (Acts 2:4, 17-18). So, when Cornelius and his household burst forth in tongues, this act provides demonstrative proof that they are in fact part of the end-time prophetic band of which Joel prophesied. They too are connected to the prophets that “testify” about Jesus (Acts 10:43). This astonishes Peter’s colleagues, because they recognize the clear implications that flow from this dramatic event: since Cornelius and his household are prophets, they must also be “servants” of the Lord (that is, members of the people of God). How, then, can Peter and the others withhold baptism from them? (Acts 10:47-48).

The importance of this connection in the narrative is highlighted further in Acts 11:15-18. Here, as Peter recounts the events

²³ Italics mine.

²⁴ Of the eight instances where Luke describes the initial reception of the Spirit by a person or group, five specifically allude to some form of inspired speech as an immediate result (Luke 1:41; 1:67; Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6) and one implies the occurrence of such activity (Acts 8:15, 18). In the remaining two instances, although inspired speech is absent from Luke’s account (Luke 3:22; Acts 9:17), it is a prominent feature in the pericopes that follow (Luke 4:14, 18f.; Acts 9:20).

associated with the conversion of Cornelius and his household, he emphasizes that “the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15) and then declares, “God gave them the same gift as he gave us...” (Acts 11:17). The fact that Jewish disciples at Pentecost and Gentile believers at Caesarea all spoke in tongues is not incidental to Luke’s purposes; rather, it represents a significant theme in his story of the movement of the gospel from Jews in Jerusalem to Gentiles in Rome and beyond.

2.2 Salvation History and Tongues in Luke-Acts

Some might be tempted to suggest at this point that the special role that speaking in tongues plays as a sign in Acts 2 and Acts 10 indicates that, in Luke’s view, this phenomenon was limited to these historically significant events in the early days of the founding of the church. This, however, would be to misread Luke’s narrative. Luke states the point with particular clarity in Acts 2:17-21:

[v. 17] *In the last days, God says,* [Joel: ‘after these things’]
 I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
 Your sons and daughters will prophesy
Your young men will see visions, [Joel: these lines are inverted]
Your old men will dream dreams.
 [v. 18] *Even on my servants, both men and women,* [additions to Joel]
 I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
And they will prophesy.
 [v. 19] I will show wonders in the heaven *above*
 And *signs* on the earth *below,*
 Blood and fire and billows of smoke.
 [v. 20] The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood
 Before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
 [v. 21] And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
 (Acts 2:17-21; modification of Joel 2:28-32 italicized).

It is important to note that here Luke carefully shapes this quotation from the LXX in order to highlight important theological themes and truths. Three modifications are particularly striking:

First, in v. 17 Luke alters the order of the two lines that refer to young men having visions and old men dreaming dreams. In Joel, the old men dreaming dreams comes first. But Luke reverses the order: “Your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams”

(Acts 2: 17). Luke gives the reference to “visions” pride of place in order to highlight a theme that he sees as vitally important and which recurs throughout his narrative. Although words associated with “dreams” are rare in Luke-Acts,²⁵ Luke loves to recount stories in which God directs his church through visions.²⁶ The visions of Paul and Ananias (Acts 9:10-11), of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:3, 17), Paul’s Macedonian vision (Acts 16:9-10), and his vision at Corinth (Acts 18:9-10) are but a few. Luke is not fixated on visions; rather, he seeks to encourage his readers to embrace an important truth: God delights to lead us, his end-time prophets, in very personal and special ways, including visions, angelic visitations, and the prompting of the Spirit, so that we might fulfill our calling to take the gospel to “the ends of the earth.”

Secondly, Luke inserts the phrase, “And they will prophesy,” into the quotation in v. 18. It is as if Luke is saying, “whatever you do, don’t miss this!” In these last days the servants of God will be anointed by the Spirit to proclaim his good news and declare his praises. They will prophesy! This is what is now taking place. The speaking in tongues that you hear, declares Peter, is a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. This special form of Spirit-inspired prophetic speech serves as a unique sign that “the last days” have arrived (cf. Acts 2:33-36; 10:45-46). Of course, this theme of Spirit-inspired witness runs throughout the narrative of Acts.²⁷

Thirdly, with the addition of a few words in v. 19, Luke transforms Joel’s text to read: “I will show wonders in the heaven *above*, and *signs* on the earth *below*.” The significance of these insertions, which form a collocation of “wonders” and “signs,” becomes apparent when we look at the larger context of Acts. The first verse that follows the Joel citation declares, “Jesus...was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, *wonders and signs*” (Acts 2:22). And throughout the book of Acts we read of the followers of Jesus working “wonders and signs.” In this way, Luke links the miraculous events associated with Jesus

²⁵ The term translated ‘shall dream’ is a future passive of ἐνυπνιάζω. This verb occurs only in Acts 2:17 and in Jude 8 in the entire New Testament. The noun, ἐνύπνιον (‘dream’), is found nowhere else in Acts or the rest of the New Testament.

²⁶ The noun translated ‘visions’ in v. 17, ὄρασις, occurs four times in the New Testament and only here in Acts. The other three occurrences are all found in Revelation. However, Luke uses another term, a close cousin to ὄρασις, the neuter noun, ὄραμα, often and at decisive points in his narrative to refer to ‘visions’. The noun ὄραμα occurs 12 times in the New Testament and 11 of these occurrences are found in the book of Acts (Acts 7:31; 9:10, 12; 10: 3, 17, 19; 11:5; 12:9; 16:9, 10; 18:9; and then also in Mt. 17:9).

²⁷ See especially Acts 4:13, 31; 5:32; 6:10; 9:31; 13:9, 52.

(Acts 2:22) and his disciples (e.g. Acts 2:43) together with the cosmic portents listed by Joel (see Acts 2:19b-20) as “signs and wonders” that mark the era of fulfillment, “the last days.” For Luke, “these last days” – that period inaugurated with Jesus’ birth and leading up to the Day of the Lord – represents an epoch marked by “signs and wonders.” Luke is conscious of the significant role that these phenomena have played in the growth of the early church. According to Luke, then, visions, prophecy, and miracles – all of these should continue to characterize the life of the church in these “last days.”

This text also demonstrates that for Luke, the salvation history presented in his narrative cannot be rigidly segmented into discrete periods. The Kingdom of God (or the new age when God’s covenant promises begin to find fulfillment) is inaugurated with the miraculous birth of Jesus (or, at the very latest, with Jesus’ public ministry, which was marked by miracles). The Kingdom continues to be progressively realized until his second coming and the consummation of God’s redemptive plan. Acts 2:17-22 thus offers an important insight into Luke’s view of salvation history. Pentecost is indeed a significant eschatological event, but it does not represent the disciples’ entrance into the new age;²⁸ rather, Pentecost is the fulfillment of Moses’ wish that “all the Lord’s people were prophets” (Num. 11:29; cf. Joel 2:28-29/Acts 2:17-18) and, as such, represents an equipping of the church for its divinely appointed mission. In short, in this crucial passage Luke stresses the continuity that unites the story of Jesus and the story of the early church. Luke’s two-volume work represents the “one history of Jesus Christ,”²⁹ a fact that is implied by the opening words of Acts: “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach...” (Acts 1:1).³⁰

One significant implication that flows from this insight is that the birthday of the church cannot be dated to Pentecost. Indeed, in his stimulating monograph, Graham Twelftree argues that, for Luke, the beginning of the church must be traced back to Jesus’ selection of the Twelve. Twelftree declares, “Luke would not call Pentecost the birth of the Church. For him the origins of the Church [are] in the call and community of followers of Jesus during his ministry.”³¹ Furthermore,

²⁸ Only by reading Luke-Acts through the lens of Pauline theology can Pentecost be construed as the moment when the disciples enter into the new age.

²⁹ Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1979), 59.

³⁰ Graham H. Twelftree, *People of the Spirit: Exploring Luke’s View of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 30.

³¹ Twelftree, *People of the Spirit*, 28.

Twelftree asserts that “the ministry of the Church is not seen as distinct from but continues the ministry of Jesus...”³² These conclusions, drawn largely from Luke’s portrait of the apostles, are supported by Luke’s citation of Joel’s prophecy.

All of this has a direct bearing on the question at hand, on how we should view tongues today. As a manifestation of prophecy, Luke suggests that tongues have an ongoing role to play in the life of the church. Remember, a characteristic of “the last days” – that era of fulfillment that begins with the birth of Jesus and ends with his second coming – is that all of God’s people will prophesy (Acts 2:17-18). The fact that Luke recounts various instances of the fulfillment of this prophecy that feature speaking in tongues encourages the reader to understand that, like “signs and wonders” and bold, Spirit-inspired witness for Jesus, speaking in tongues will characterize the life of the church in these last days. To suggest otherwise runs counter to Luke’s explicitly stated message, not to mention that of Paul (1 Corinthians 14:39).

2.3 Jesus Our Model

Luke not only views speaking in tongues as a special type of prophetic speech that has an ongoing role in the life of the church, there are also indications that he sees this form of exuberant, inspired speech modeled in the life of Jesus. Apart from the general parallels between Jesus and his disciples with reference to Spirit-inspired prophetic speech (e.g., Luke 4:18-19; Acts 2:17-18), Luke provides a specific, unique parallel in Luke 10:21: “At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth...’”

This joyful outburst of thanksgiving is a response given within an interesting context – the return of the Seventy from their mission. As we shall see, the sending of the Seventy (Luke 10:1, 17) echoes the prophetic anointing of the seventy elders in Numbers 11.³³ Some scholars, such as Gordon Wenham, describe the prophesying narrated in Numbers 11:24-30 as an instance of “unintelligible ecstatic utterance, what the New Testament terms speaking in tongues.”³⁴

³² Twelftree, *People of the Spirit*, 28.

³³ See also Robert P. Menzies, “The Sending of the Seventy and Luke’s Purpose,” in Paul Alexander, Jordan D. May, and Robert Reid, eds., *Trajectories in the Book of Acts: Essays in Honor of John Wesley Wykoff* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 87-113.

³⁴ Gordon Wenham, *Numbers* (Tyndale OT Commentary Series), 109. I am indebted to my good friend, Grant Hochman, for pointing me to this reference.

On the heels of this passage, Luke describes Jesus' inspired exultation. Particularly important for our discussion is the manner in which Luke introduces Jesus' words of praise: "he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said" (ἠγαλλιάσατο ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ εἶπεν; Luke 10:21).³⁵ The verb, ἀγαλλιάω (rejoice), employed here by Luke is used frequently in the LXX. It is usually found in the Psalms and the poetic portions of the Prophets, and it denotes spiritual exultation that issues forth in praise to God for his mighty acts.³⁶ The subject of the verb is not simply ushered into a state of sacred rapture; he also "declares the acts of God."³⁷ In the New Testament the verb is used in a similar manner. The linkage between ἀγαλλιάω and the declaration of the mighty acts of God is particularly striking in Luke-Acts.³⁸ The verb describes the joyful praise of Mary (Luke 1:47), Jesus (Luke 10:21), and David (Acts 2:26) in response to God's salvific activity in Jesus. In Luke 1:47 and 10:21 the verb is specifically linked to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and in Acts 2:25-30 David is described as a prophet. This verb, then, was for Luke a particularly appropriate way of describing prophetic activity.

The reference in Acts 2:26 is especially interesting; for here, the verb ἀγαλλιάω is associated with the word γλῶσσα (tongue). In a quotation from Psalm 16:9 (Psalm 15:9, LXX), Peter cites David as saying, "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices (καὶ ἠγαλλιάσατο ἡ γλῶσσά μου)..." This association of ἀγαλλιάω with γλῶσσα should not surprise us, for five of the eight references to γλῶσσα in Luke-Acts describe experiences of spiritual exultation that result in praise.³⁹ All of this indicates that, for Luke, ἀγαλλιάω and γλῶσσα, when associated with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are terms that describe special instances of prophetic inspiration, instances in which a person or group experiences spiritual exultation and, as a result, bursts forth in praise.

We conclude that Luke 10:21 describes Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving in terms reminiscent of speaking in tongues: inspired by the Spirit, Jesus bursts forth in exuberant and joyful praise. Although it is unlikely that Luke's readers would have understood this outburst of

³⁵ I am following the American Standard Version here for the English translation.

³⁶ R. Bultmann, "ἀγαλλιάομαι," TDNT, I, 19; W.G. Morrice, *Joy in the New Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1984), 20.

³⁷ R. Bultmann, "ἀγαλλιάομαι," 20.

³⁸ The linkage is made explicit in three out of four occurrences of the verb (Luke 1:47; 10:21; Acts 2:26). The only exception is Acts 16:34.

³⁹ These five include: Luke 1:64, Acts 2:4, 2:26, 10:46, 19:6. The other three references to γλῶσσα are found in Luke 16:24; Acts 2:3, 11.

inspired praise to include unintelligible utterances (i.e., glossolalia), the account does describe a relatively similar experience of spiritual rapture that produces joyful praise. What is abundantly clear is that Luke presents Jesus' Spirit-inspired prophetic ministry, including his bold proclamation and exultant praise, as a model for his readers,⁴⁰ living as they do, in these "last days."

We may summarize our argument to this point as follows:

- 1) Glossolalia was well known and widely practiced in the early church. Luke's references to speaking in tongues (λαλέω γλώσσαις) in Acts 10:46, 19:6, and quite possibly (but less certain) 2:4, designate unintelligible utterances inspired by the Spirit rather than the speaking of human languages previously not learned. However we interpret this latter text (Acts 2:4), the importance of the verbal connections between the λαλέω γλώσσαις (to speak in tongues) of Acts 2:4, Acts 10:46, and Acts 19:6 should not be missed.
- 2) Luke's narrative reveals that he views speaking in tongues as a special type of prophetic speech. Speaking in tongues is associated with prophecy in each of the three passages which describe this phenomenon in Acts (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6).
- 3) As a special manifestation of prophecy, Luke indicates that glossolalia has an ongoing role to play in the life of the church. This is evident from Luke's modification of Joel's prophecy in Acts 2:17-21. Here, we see that tongues serve as a sign of the arrival of the last days (Acts 2:17-21) and also of Jesus' resurrection and Lordship (Acts 2:33-36). Tongues, it should be noted, continue to serve as a demonstrable sign of reception of the prophetic gift throughout Luke's narrative (Acts 10:44-48; 19:6-7). This text (Acts 2:17-21), particularly as it is seen in the larger context of Luke-Acts, also establishes that, in Luke's perspective, speaking in tongues will continue to characterize the life of the church in these last days (that is, until Jesus returns).
- 4) Luke presents Jesus' experience of the Spirit and his life of prayer as important models for his readers. Luke 10:21, which describes Jesus, in language reminiscent of speaking in

⁴⁰ Luke's emphasis on prayer, and particularly the prayers and prayer-life of Jesus, is widely recognized by contemporary scholars. Luke also associates prayer with the Holy Spirit in a unique way (e.g. Luke 3:21-22; 11:13; Acts 4:31).

tongues, bursting forth with Spirit-inspired, exuberant and joyful praise, is no exception.

All of this adds up to quite a resume for tongues in Luke-Acts. However, an important question still remains unanswered: Does Luke envision every believer actively engaging in glossolalia? Put another way, according to Luke, is speaking in tongues available to all? In my previous writings, I suggested that Luke does not consciously address this question. I went on to argue, however, that Paul does; and that he does so in the affirmative.⁴¹ Nevertheless, I now believe that my judgment concerning Luke was a bit hasty. There are several texts in Luke's gospel, all unique to Luke or uniquely shaped by him, that reveal a clear intent to encourage his readers to pray for prophetic anointings, experiences that will inevitably produce bold witness and joyful praise. Luke's narrative calls for his readers to recognize that these pneumatic anointings, these experiences of spiritual rapture which issue forth in praise, are indeed available to every disciple of Jesus and that they will routinely take the form of glossolalia. To these key texts we now turn.

3. Luke's Challenge for the Individual Believer

The first text we shall consider is Luke's account of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:28-44), a story found in various forms in all four gospels.

3.1 Luke 19:39-40

It is widely recognized that Luke closely follows Mark's account (Mark 11:1-10), but with one significant exception. Luke 19:39-40 is found only in Luke's gospel: "Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!' 'I tell you,' he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out' (Luke 19:39-40).

At first glance the inclusion of this material in this story may not appear striking. However, when viewed in light of Luke's emphasis on Spirit-inspired praise and witness throughout Luke-Acts, it takes on special meaning. Luke's narrative is filled with the praises of God's people, all of whom declare the mighty deeds of God. The

⁴¹ See Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), pp. 121-144.

chorus of praise begins in the infancy narratives with Elizabeth's Blessing (Luke 1:42-45), Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), Zechariah's Song (Luke 1:67-79), and Simeon's Prophecy (Luke 2:29-32). Angels join in as well (Luke 2:13-14). The sound of Spirit-inspired praise continues with Jesus' joyful outburst (Luke 10:21-24). The angelic praise of Luke 2:13-14 is then echoed by the crowd of disciples as they welcome Jesus as he enters into Jerusalem (Luke 19:37-38). Of course in Luke 19:39-40 Luke uniquely highlights the significance of this praise. The chorus is again picked up on the day of Pentecost with the dramatic declaration of God's mighty deeds by those who have been filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-13). It continues throughout Luke's narrative in the form of bold, Spirit-inspired witness to Jesus.⁴² Irruptions of prophecy and praise are again associated with the Spirit and glossolalia in Acts 10:46 and Acts 19:6.

These texts, collectively, constitute a motif that is clearly close to Luke's heart. In these last days, Luke declares, the Spirit will inspire his end-time prophets to declare God's mighty deeds, chief of which is the resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, if the disciples remain silent, "the stones will cry out!" The message to Luke's church, a church facing opposition and persecution,⁴³ could hardly be missed. Praise and bold witness go hand in hand, they are both the necessary and inevitable consequence of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

3.2 Luke 10:1-16

Let us now turn to another text unique to Luke's gospel, Luke's account of the Sending of the Seventy (Luke 10:1-16). All three synoptic gospels record Jesus' words of instruction to the Twelve as he sends them out on their mission. However, only Luke records a second, larger sending of disciples (Luke 10:1-16). In Luke 10:1 we read, "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two [some mss. read, 'seventy'] others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go." A series of detailed instructions follow. Finally, Jesus reminds them of their authority, "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." (10:16).

⁴² See, for example, Acts 4:13, 31; 5:32; 6:10; 9:31; 13:9, 52.

⁴³ On Luke's church as a community facing persecution, see Robert Menzies, "The Persecuted Prophets: A Mirror-Image of Luke's Spirit-Inspired Church," in I. Howard Marshall, Volker Rabens, and Cornelis Bennema, eds., *The Spirit and Christ in the New Testament & Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), pp. 52-70.

A central question centers on the number of disciples that Jesus sent out and its significance. The manuscript evidence is, at this point, divided. Some manuscripts read “seventy,” while others list the number as “seventy–two.” Bruce Metzger, in his article on this question, noted that the external manuscript evidence is evenly divided and internal considerations are also inconclusive. Metzger thus concluded that the number “cannot be determined with confidence.”⁴⁴ More recent scholarship has largely agreed with Metzger, with a majority opting cautiously for the authenticity of “seventy–two” as the more difficult reading.⁴⁵ Although we cannot determine the number with confidence, it will be important to keep the divided nature of the manuscript evidence in mind as we wrestle with the significance of this text.

Most scholars agree that the number (for convenience, we will call it “seventy”) has symbolic significance. Certainly Jesus’ selection of twelve disciples was no accident. The number twelve clearly symbolizes the reconstitution of Israel (Gen. 35:23-26), the people of God. This suggests that the number seventy is rooted in the OT narrative and has symbolic significance as well. A number of proposals have been put forward,⁴⁶ but I would argue that the background for the reference to the “seventy” is to be found in Numbers 11:24–30. This passage describes how the Lord “took of the Spirit that was on [Moses] and put the Spirit on the seventy elders” (Num. 11:25). This resulted in the seventy elders, who had gathered around the Tent, prophesying for a short duration. However, two other elders, Eldad and Medad, did not go to the Tent; rather, they remained in the camp. But the Spirit also fell on them and they too began to prophesy and continued to do so. Joshua, hearing this news, rushed to

⁴⁴ Bruce Metzger, “Seventy or Seventy-Two Disciples?,” NTS 5 (1959), 299-306 (quote, 306). See also the response of Sidney Jellicoe, “St Luke and the ‘Seventy (-Two),” NTS 6 (1960), 319-21.

⁴⁵ All of the following scholars favor the “seventy-two” reading as original: Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9.51-24.53* (Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 994; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGCT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 415; Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 409; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Volume 1: The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 233; Craig Evans, *Luke* (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1990), 172. One exception to this general rule is John Nolland, who favors the “seventy” reading (Nolland, *Luke 9.21-18.34* [Word Biblical Commentary 35B; Dallas, TX: Word, 1993], 546.).

⁴⁶ For the various options see Metzger, “Seventy or Seventy-Two Disciples,” 303-4 and Bock, *Luke 9.51-24.53*, 1015.

Moses and urged him to stop them. Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” (Num. 11:29).

The Numbers 11 proposal has a number of significant advantages over other explanations: (1) it accounts for the two textual traditions underlying Luke 10:1 (How many actually prophesied in Numbers 11?); (2) it finds explicit fulfillment in the narrative of Acts; (3) it ties into one of the great themes of Luke–Acts, the work of the Holy Spirit; and (4) numerous allusions to Moses and his actions in Luke’s travel narrative support our suggestion that the symbolism for Luke’s reference to the Seventy should be found in Numbers 11.⁴⁷

With this background in mind, the significance of the symbolism is found in the expansion of the number of disciples “sent out” into mission from the Twelve to the Seventy. The reference to the Seventy evokes memories of Moses’ wish that “all the Lord’s people were prophets,” and, in this way, points ahead to Pentecost (Acts 2), where this wish is initially and dramatically fulfilled. This wish continues to be fulfilled throughout Acts as Luke describes the coming of the empowering Spirit of prophecy to other new centers of missionary activity, such as those gathered together in Samaria (Acts 8:14–17), Cornelius’ house (Acts 10:44–48), and Ephesus (Acts 19:1–7). The reference to the Seventy, then, does not simply anticipate the mission of the church to the Gentiles; rather, it foreshadows the outpouring of the Spirit on all the servants of the Lord and their universal participation in the mission of God (Acts 2:17–18; cf. 4:31).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ For more detailed support of this position, see Robert P. Menzies, *The Language of the Spirit: Interpreting and Translating Charismatic Terms* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), 73–82.

⁴⁸ Keith F. Nickle, *Preaching the Gospel of Luke: Proclaiming God’s Royal Rule* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), p. 117: “The ‘Seventy’ is the church in its entirety, including Luke’s own community, announcing the in-breaking of God’s royal rule throughout the Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 409; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Volume 1: The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 233; Craig Evans, *Luke* (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1990), 172. One exception to this general rule is John Nolland, who favors the “seventy” reading (Nolland, *Luke 9.21–18.34* [Word Biblical Commentary 35B; Dallas, TX: Word, 1993], 546.).

⁴⁸ For the various options see Metzger, “Seventy or Seventy-Two Disciples,” pp. 303–4 and Bock, *Luke 9.51–24.53*, 1015.

⁴⁸ For more detailed support of this position, see Robert P. Menzies, *The Language of the Spirit: Interpreting and Translating Charismatic Terms* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), 73–82.

In Luke's view, every member of the church is called (Luke 24:45–49; Acts 1:4–8/Isa. 49:6) and empowered (Acts 2:17–21; cf. 4:31) to be a prophet. Luke 10:1 anticipates the fulfillment of this reality.

It is important to note that the ecstatic speech of the elders in Numbers 11 constitutes the backdrop against which Luke interprets the Pentecostal and subsequent outpourings of the Spirit.⁴⁹ It would appear that Luke views every believer as (at least potentially) an end-time prophet, and that he anticipates that they too will issue forth in Spirit-inspired ecstatic speech.⁵⁰ This is the clear implication of his narrative, which includes repetitive fulfillments of Moses' wish that reference glossolalia.

Of the four instances in the book of Acts where Luke actually describes the initial coming of the Spirit, three explicitly cite glossolalia as the immediate result (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6) and the other one (Acts 8:14-19) strongly implies it.⁵¹ This is the case even though Luke could have easily used other language, particularly in Acts 2, to describe what had transpired. The Acts 8 passage has various purposes. However, when it is viewed in the context of Luke's larger narrative, there can be little doubt in the reader's mind concerning the cause of Simon's ill-fated attempt to purchase the ability to dispense the Spirit. The motif is transparent; Luke's point is made: the Pentecostal gift, as a fulfillment of Moses' wish (Num. 11:29) and Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32), is a prophetic anointing that enables its recipient to bear bold witness for Jesus *and, this being the case, it is marked by the ecstatic speech characteristic of prophets* (i.e. glossolalia).

This explains why Luke considered tongues to be a sign of the reception of the Pentecostal gift. Certainly Luke does present tongues as evidence of the Spirit's coming. On the day of Pentecost Peter declares that the tongues of the disciples served as a sign. Their tongues not only established the fact that they, the disciples of Jesus, were the end-time prophets of which Joel prophesied; their tongues also

⁴⁸ Keith F. Nickle, *Preaching the Gospel of Luke: Proclaiming God's Royal Rule* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 117: "The 'Seventy' is the church in its entirety, length and breadth of God's creation."

⁴⁹ As we have noted, Gordon Wenham describes the prophesying narrated in Numbers 11:24-30 as an instance of "unintelligible ecstatic utterance, what the New Testament terms speaking in tongues" (Wenham, *Numbers*, 109).

⁵⁰ With the term, "ecstatic," I mean "pertaining to or flowing from an experience of intense joy." I do not wish to imply a loss of control with this term. While glossolalia transcends our reasoning faculties, the experience does not render them useless (cf. 1 Cor. 14:28, 32-33).

⁵¹ Paul's experience of the Spirit is not actually described (Acts 9:17-19); rather, it is implied.

marked the arrival of the last days (Acts 2:17-21) and served to establish the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead and is Lord (Acts 2:33-36). In Acts 10:44-48 “speaking in tongues” is again “depicted as proof positive and sufficient to convince Peter’s companions” that the Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles.⁵² In Acts 19:6 tongues and prophecy are cited as the immediate results of the coming of the Spirit, the incontrovertible evidence of an affirmative answer to Paul’s question posed earlier in the narrative: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

It is interesting to note that Luke does not share the angst of many modern Christians concerning the possibility of false tongues. Luke does not offer guidelines for discerning whether tongues are genuine or fake, from God or from some other source.⁵³ Rather, Luke assumes that the Christian community will know and experience that which is needed and good. This observation leads us to our next text.

3.3 Luke 11:9-13

Another text that reflects Luke’s desire to encourage his church to experience the prophetic inspiration of the Spirit and all that entails (i.e. joyful praise, glossolalia, and bold witness) is found in Luke 11:13. This verse, which forms the climax to Jesus’ teaching on prayer, again testifies to the fact that Luke views the work of the Holy Spirit described in Acts as relevant for the life of his church. Luke is not writing wistfully about an era of charismatic activity in the distant past.⁵⁴ Luke 11:13 reads, “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” It is instructive to note that the parallel passage in Matthew’s gospel contains slightly different phrasing: “how much more will your Father in heaven give *good gifts* to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:11).⁵⁵ It is virtually certain that Luke has interpreted the “good gifts” in his source material

⁵² James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 189.

⁵³ This sort of lacuna led James Dunn, over thirty years ago, to describe Luke’s perspective as “lop-sided” (Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 191, 195). Given the dramatic rise of the Pentecostal movement and the sad state of many traditional churches, one wonders if Professor Dunn might now be more sympathetic to Luke’s enthusiastic approach. Perhaps by listening more carefully to Luke the church can regain its balance.

⁵⁴ Contra the judgment of Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987 [German original, 1963]), 15, 159-60.

⁵⁵ Italics are mine.

with a reference to the “Holy Spirit.”⁵⁶ Luke, then, provides us with a Spirit-inspired, authoritative commentary on this saying of Jesus. Three important implications follow:

First, Luke’s alteration of the Matthean (or Q) form of the saying anticipates the post-resurrection experience of the church.⁵⁷ This is evident from the fact that the promise that the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask begins to be realized only at Pentecost. By contemporizing the text in this way, Luke stresses the relevance of the saying for the post-Pentecostal community to which he writes. It would seem that for Luke there is no neat line of separation dividing the apostolic church from his church or ours. Quite the contrary, Luke calls his readers to follow in their footsteps.

Second, the context indicates that the promise is made to disciples (Luke 11:1). Thus, Luke’s contemporized version of the saying is clearly directed to the members of the Christian community.⁵⁸ Since it is addressed to Christians, the promise cannot refer to an initiatory or soteriological gift.⁵⁹ This judgment finds confirmation in the repetitive character of the exhortations to pray in Luke 11:9:⁶⁰ prayer for the Spirit (and, in light of the promise, we may presume this includes the reception of the Spirit) is to be an ongoing practice. The gift of the Holy Spirit to which Luke refers neither initiates one into the new age, nor is it to be received only once;⁶¹ rather, this pneumatic gift is given to disciples and it is to be experienced on an ongoing basis.

Third, Luke’s usage elsewhere indicates that he viewed the gift of the Holy Spirit in 11:13 as a prophetic enabling. On two

⁵⁶ Reasons for this conclusion include: (1) the fact that the reference to the Holy Spirit breaks the parallelism of the “good gifts” given by earthly fathers and “the good gifts” given by our heavenly Father; (2) Luke often inserts references to the Holy Spirit into his source material; (3) Matthew never omits or adds references to the Holy Spirit in his sources.

⁵⁷ J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke, Vol. 2* (AB 28; New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 916; E.E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (NCB; London: Oliphants, Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1974), 164; R. Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1984), 46.

⁵⁸ The scholarly consensus affirms that Luke-Acts was addressed primarily to Christians.

⁵⁹ G.T. Montague, *The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition* (New York: Paulist, 1976), 259-60.

⁶⁰ Note the repetitive or continuous action implicit in the verbs in 11:9: αἰτεῖτε (ask), ζητεῖτε (seek), κρούετε (knock).

⁶¹ F. Büchsel notes the repetitive character of the exhortation (*Der Geist Gottes im Neuen Testament* [Gütersloh: C. Bertlesmann, 1926], pp. 189-90). So also Montague, *Spirit*, 259-260.

occasions in Luke-Acts the Spirit is given to those praying;⁶² in both the Spirit is portrayed as the source of prophetic activity. Luke's account of Jesus' baptism indicates that Jesus received the Spirit after his baptism while praying (Luke 3:21). This gift of the Spirit, portrayed principally as the source of prophetic power (Luke 4:18-19), equipped Jesus for his messianic task. Later, in Acts 4:31 the disciples, after having prayed, "were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." Again the Spirit given in response to prayer is the impetus for prophetic activity.

What sort of prophetic activity did Luke anticipate would accompany this bestowal of the Spirit? Certainly a reading of Luke's narrative would suggest a wide range of possibilities: joyful praise, glossolalia, visions, bold witness in the face of persecution, to name a few. However, several aspects of Luke's narrative suggest that glossolalia was one of the expected outcomes in Luke's mind and in the minds of his readers.

First, as we noted, Luke's narrative suggests that glossolalia typically accompanies the initial reception of the Spirit. Furthermore, Luke highlights the fact that glossolalia serves as an external sign of the prophetic gift. These elements of Luke's account would undoubtedly encourage readers in Luke's church, like they have with contemporary readers, to seek the prophetic gift, *complete with its accompanying external sign*. In short, in Luke 11:13 Luke encourages his church to pray for an experience of spiritual rapture that will produce power and praise in their lives, an experience similar to those modeled by Jesus (Luke 3:21-22; 10:21) and the early church (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6). The reader would naturally assume glossolalia to be a normal, frequent, and expected part of this experience.

Secondly, in view of the emphasis in this passage on asking (vs. 9) and the Father's willingness to respond (vs. 13), it would seem natural for Luke readers to ask a question that again is often asked by contemporary Christians, how will we know when we have received this gift? Here we hear echoes of Paul's question in Acts 19:6. Of course, Luke has provided a clear answer. The arrival of prophetic

⁶² Acts 8:15, 17 represents the only instance in Luke-Acts, apart from the two texts discussed above, where reception of the Spirit is explicitly associated with prayer. However here the Spirit is bestowed on the Samaritans in response to the prayer of Peter and John. While the situation in Acts 8:15, 17 is not a true parallel to Luke 11:13, in Acts 8:15, 17 the Spirit is also portrayed in prophetic terms. Prayer is implicitly associated with the reception of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1:14; 2:4). Here also the gift of the Spirit is presented as a prophetic endowment. So also Acts 9:17, though here the actual reception of the Spirit is not described.

power has a visible, external sign: glossolalia. This is not to say that there are not other ways in which the Spirit's power and presence are made known to us. This is simply to affirm that Luke's narrative indicates that a visible, external sign does exist and that he and his readers would naturally expect to manifest this sign.

I would add that this sign must have been tremendously encouraging for Luke's church as it is for countless contemporary Christians. It signified their connection with the apostolic church and confirmed their identity as end-time prophets. I find it interesting that so many believers from traditional churches today react negatively to the notion of glossolalia as a visible sign. They often ask, should we really emphasize a visible sign like tongues? Yet these same Christians participate in a liturgical form of worship that is filled with sacraments and imagery; a form of worship that emphasizes visible signs. Signs are valuable when they point to something significant. Luke and his church clearly understood this.

Finally, the question should be asked, why would Luke need to encourage his readers not to be afraid of receiving a bad or harmful gift (note the snake and scorpion of vs. 11-12)? Why would he need to encourage his church to pursue this gift of the Spirit? If the gift is quiet, internal, and ethereal, why the concern? However, if the gift includes glossolalia, which is noisy, unintelligible, and has many pagan counterparts,⁶³ then the concerns make sense.⁶⁴ Luke's response is designed to quell any fears. The Father gives good gifts. We need not fret or fear.

In short, through his skillful editing of this saying of Jesus (Luke 11:13), Luke encourages post-Pentecostal disciples to pray for a prophetic anointing, an experience of spiritual rapture that will produce power and praise in their lives, an experience similar to those modeled by Jesus (Luke 3:21-22; 10:21) and the early church (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6). The reader would naturally expect glossolalia to be a normal, frequent, and expected part of this experience. The fact that Luke viewed glossolalia as a significant component of this bestowal of the Spirit is suggested by both the larger and more immediate contexts. The

⁶³ For Jewish and pagan examples of ecstasy and inspired utterances see Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 304-5.

⁶⁴ Note that the Beelzebul controversy immediately follows (Luke 11:14-28). Some accused Jesus of being demon-possessed (Luke 11:15). The early Christians were undoubtedly confronted with similar charges. It is thus not surprising that Luke "takes pains to show [that] Christianity [is] both different from and superior to magic" (Richard Vinson, *Luke* [Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2008], 380; cf. Acts 8:9-24; 16:16-18; 19:11-20).

larger context of Luke-Acts portrays tongues as an external sign of the Spirit's coming. The immediate context indicates Luke's encouragement to pray for the Holy Spirit is a response to the fears of some within his community. This text, then, indicates that Luke viewed tongues as positive and available to every disciple of Jesus.

4. Conclusion

I have argued that, according to Luke, tongues played a significant role in the life of the apostolic church. Furthermore, Luke expected that tongues would continue to play a positive role in his church and ours, both of which exist within the period of "these last days." In Luke's view, every believer can manifest this spiritual gift. So, Luke encourages every believer to pray for prophetic anointings (Luke 11:13), experiences of Spirit-inspired exultation from which power and praise flow; experiences similar to those modeled by Jesus (Luke 3:21-22; 10:21) and the early church (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6). Luke believed that these experiences would typically include glossolalia, which he considered a special form of prophetic speech and a sign that the Pentecostal gift had been received.

These conclusions are based on a number of interrelated arguments that might be summarized as follows:

- 1) Glossolalia was well known and widely practiced in the early church.
- 2) Luke's narrative reveals that he views speaking in tongues as a special type of prophetic speech.
- 3) Luke indicates that glossolalia, as a special type of prophetic speech, has an ongoing role to play in the life of the church.
- 4) Luke presents Jesus' experience of the Spirit and his life of prayer, including a significant moment of spiritual rapture in which he bursts forth with joyful praise (Luke 10:21), as important models for his readers.
- 5) Luke highlights in a unique way the importance and necessity of Spirit-inspired praise: praise and bold witness go hand in hand, they are both the necessary and inevitable consequence of being filled with the Holy Spirit.
- 6) Luke views the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit as a fulfillment of Moses' wish (Num. 11:29) and Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32). Thus, it is a prophetic anointing that is marked

by the ecstatic speech characteristic of prophets (i.e. glossolalia).

- 7) According to Luke, the gift of tongues is available to every disciple of Jesus; thus, Luke encourages believers to pray for a prophetic anointing, which he envisions will include glossolalia.

These conclusions suggest that Luke presents a challenge to the contemporary church – a church that has all too often lost sight of its apostolic calling and charismatic roots. Glossolalia, in a unique way, symbolizes this challenge. It reminds us of our calling and our need of divine enabling. This was true of Luke’s church and it is equally true of ours. Put another way, tongues remind us of our true identity: we are to be a community of prophets, called and empowered to bear bold witness for Jesus and to declare his mighty deeds.

It should not surprise us, then, that the gift of tongues serves as an important symbol for modern Pentecostals. Just as this experience connected Luke’s church with its apostolic roots; so also tongues serves a similar purpose for Pentecostals today. It symbolizes and validates our approach to the book of Acts: its stories become “our” stories. This in turn encourages us to reconsider our apostolic calling and our charismatic heritage. In short, for Pentecostals tongues serve as a sign that the calling and power of the apostolic church is valid for believers today.