

## The Holy Spirit and Power in Luke-Acts and their Significance for Christian Service

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**Abstract.** Most scholars accept the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles as a single volume and Luke is generally believed to be the author. Luke's interest in the Holy Spirit is remarkable. This paper undertakes the exegesis of the texts on the Holy Spirit and Power in Luke-Acts. It is most likely Luke made a kind of distinction between Holy Spirit and power in some texts of Luke-Acts. Both, it seems are separable and are of God for the empowerment of His people for service. There is therefore the need for the re-reading of those texts. However, the paper does not lose sight of the significance of the Holy Spirit and power for empowerment for service.

**Keywords:** Holy Spirit, Power, Empowerment, Significance, Pentecost.

### 1. Introduction

The Holy Spirit is one of the major themes in Luke-Acts. His activity is noticeable from the first chapter of Luke's Gospel and in Acts of the Apostles. As Michael Green has noted, Luke more than any other Evangelist emphasizes the activity of the Holy Spirit in the entire life and ministry of Jesus.(1995) To Luke, the Holy Spirit was equally indispensable in the life and ministry of the disciples. The promise of Jesus to send them the Spirit was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. He had stated that they will receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon them and they shall be his witnesses beginning from Jerusalem to the entire globe. Referring to the Messiah as being anointed by the Holy Spirit for his mission on earth (Lk 4:18), Luke adds in Acts 10:38 that God anointed him with Holy Spirit and power. This suggests that, "Holy Spirit" and "power" are two different entities. Is "Holy Spirit" in the first possible reading "power of the Holy Spirit" serving as a qualifier as a type of Spirit or the "Holy Spirit" and "power" are independent of each other, in a second possible

reading?. Is Luke consistent in his use of the two terms?

The paper employs exegetical study of relevant texts in Luke-Acts. Before then a survey of the Old Testament and the intertestamental periods on the subject of Spirit and power is carried out. The final section is devoted to Lukan theology of the Holy Spirit and Power and their significance to the believers in Jesus Christ in contemporary times.

### 2. Holy Spirit and Power in the Old Testament

The Hebrew and Greek words for "Spirit of God" are *ruach elohim* and *pneuma theou* respectively. Both connote, according to Roger Stronstad, the "invisibility, movement, power and life". "They are appropriate words to describe God in action".( 1997, pg. 13) The Spirit is the active power of God in the world. It was this power that was behind the exploits of the believers in the Old Testament. C J. H Wright begins his work on the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament from Genesis 1-3. He highlights the activities of the Holy Spirit as hovering and speaking, sustaining and renewing, breathing and leaving and groaning and birthing. All these as relate to the universe, the earth, human beings and the new creation (1988). It underscores the involvement of God's Spirit in all areas; creation and human existence. It is reasonable to conclude that "God through his Spirit, has created and continuously sustains all that exists"(Wright: 1988, pg 22).

Moses the founder of the nation of Israel had the Holy Spirit in him. It was from him some were passed on the seventy elders who relieved him of some his responsibilities (Number 11:17, 25-29). The Spirit upon them enabled them to exercise leadership authority. The event here reveals the Spirit of God coming upon a group of leaders. It was not only for

individuals.(Stronstad: 1997). Bezalel and Aholiab were filled with the Spirit of God that empowered them as artisans for the tabernacle furnishings (Exod. 35:30-36:1). Joshua, Moses' able assistant is noted to have been filled with the Spirit of leadership (Num. 27:18). The story of the filling of Old Testament saints was for skills, special abilities, victories in battles and for leadership. While there was no record of particular miracle wrought by the Judges they were nevertheless empowered to perform super human activities. It was the Spirit of God that came upon Judges like Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson that enabled them to deliver Israel from the hands of their oppressors.

The kings and prophets in Israel were Spirit filled. Samuel prophesied that the Spirit of the Lord will come upon Saul and it came to pass (1 Sam. 10:1-10). David after his anointing as king was filled with the Holy Spirit. Prophet Elijah and his successor experienced empowerment through the Spirit of God. Elisha requested for the double portion of the Spirit that was upon his master (II Kings 2: 9-15). Other prophets such as Ezekiel, Isaiah, Micah were filled with the Spirit of the Lord. Joel foresaw the out pouring of the Spirit on all people, the charismatic community, at the last days. The scripture that closely links the Spirit with power is Micah, 3:8. Micah says,

But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin. (NIV).

### 3. The Understanding of Holy Spirit and Power during Intertestamental Period

Many Biblical scholars accepted the cessation of prophetic inspiration during the so called 400 silent years, the period between Malachi and the appearance of John the Baptist. This should not be construed as complete silence on the part of God. God was still speaking to people through other media. It was just that there was no prophetic voice in Israel in the form of the classical prophets after Malachi before the appearance of John the Baptist. Roger Stronstad has it that, conscious of the absence of prophetic inspiration, Judaism looked ahead to the future restoration of prophecy in Israel( 1997).The Qumran community, a sect in Judaism that arose during this period, saw themselves as true Israel and heirs of the promises(Wright: 1992). They claim to be the end-time community that has received the Holy Spirit.

### 4. Holy Spirit and Power in Luke-Acts

We move on to Luke-Acts since there is not much to really attend to in Matthew and Mark on the subject of the Holy Spirit, for most of what they teach is covered in Luke. In the words of Thomas R. Schreiner, 'Luke gives us quite a full-orbed theology of the Spirit'. This section is a survey of the working of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts. The focus will be mainly on Jesus and his disciples. The activity of the Holy Spirit begins early in Luke. In the case of John the Baptist, angel Gabriel announces he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb (Lk. 1:15). It was a unique occurrence since it had not happened to anybody before now. And to Mary, the mother of Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Power of the most high will overshadow her resulting in the conception of the holy Child, Jesus Christ. Other persons filled with and/or led by the Holy Spirit included Zachariah and Elizabeth his wife; the parents of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:40-67). Simon who longed for the coming of the Messiah (Lk. 2:26). At his baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus "in a bodily form like a dove (Lk. 3:22).

John points to Jesus as he who will baptize his audience with the Holy Spirit and fire (Lk. 3:16, cf. Matt. 3:13-14). Luke records that at Jesus baptism, he was full of the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit that led him into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil (Lk 4: 1-2). In what is known as the inauguration narrative, Jesus expressed that he was anointed by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 61:1-4; Luk. 4:18-19). This remarkable event reveals three truths with reference to the Holy Spirit in life and ministry of Jesus. (1) He is possessing the Holy Spirit. (2) He is subject to the leading of the Holy Spirit and (3) He is depended upon the empowering of the Spirit (4:1, 14) ( Stronstad: 1997). The Holy Spirit in Jesus throughout life and ministry was without measure. This was obvious as in baptism, temptation, teaching and working of miracles.

In all the above references, the only occurrence of "Holy Spirit and Power", was in Luk.1:35. All the same, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit was manifest or evident. It is interesting that "the power of God" is expressed in Luke as independent of "the Spirit". Some people accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the means of Beelzebub, the chief of demons. Jesus pointed to them the contradiction in their false accusation. He told them he cast out demons by the power of God.

Luke's interest in the Holy Spirit continued in Acts; the second volume of his work. Acts is the continuation of the work of the Holy Spirit this time through Jesus Christ's disciples. The promise of the

Father in Luk. 24:19 is re-affirmed in Acts 1:8 and fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Peter understood the Pentecost experience as fulfillment of Joel's eschatological prophesy of the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh. The one hundred and twenty followers of Christ Jesus (Acts 1:15) were the first to be filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts (2:1-4). The purpose of being filled with the Holy Spirit was the empowerment for the fulfillment of the mandate of Acts 1:8 to be witnesses for Christ beginning from Jerusalem to every part of the world. It reads, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Other individuals, apart from the initial recipients, were filled of the Holy Spirit. Prominent among them is Apostle Paul. Ananias announces to Paul how the Lord Jesus had directed him to minister to Paul in order for him to recover his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9: 17). This was after the Damascus road encounter with Jesus that left Paul temporarily blind. All that Paul accomplished in terms of missionary endeavors and miracles he attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit (Roman 15: 19).

##### 5. Exegesis of Relevant Texts in Luke – Acts

The focus of this study is Luke-Acts texts that emphasized the expression Holy Spirit and power. These texts include Luk.1:35; 24:49, Acts1:8 and 10:38. We begin with Luke.1:35. It reads:  
*The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."*

The verse belongs to the periscope generally referred to as infant narrative. The narrative content is the birth of John and Jesus. Specifically, verse 35 is concerning Jesus to be called the son of God. *Pneuma hagion* is a definite reference to the Holy Spirit and *dunamis* means power of the most high. However, our contention is the conjunction *kai* (and). If and as most translations put it, it definitely implies that "power", in this context, is a different entity from the Holy Spirit. It is likely that the Holy Spirit and the Most High refer to two different persons. Here the power of the Most High not the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the message of the angel is that two entities would come upon Mary. The first is the Holy Spirit while the second is the power of the Most High.

Similarly, Lk. 3:16 expresses two different things by the use of *kai* (and).

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (Luk. 3:15, 16 cf. Matt 3:20).

John the Baptist is speaking of the ministry of Jesus whom he described as one more powerful than him. Jesus will baptize people with Holy Spirit and fire. It is not with Holy Spirit fire but Holy Spirit and fire. The fire in context is a clear reference to judgement to be meted to the wicked. It speaks of judgement (Keener: 1993). Again, fire is brought together with the Holy Spirit yet, it is a different entity from him. Having suggested that the term fire here does not refer to the Holy Spirit, the passage has thrown light to Luke's combination of different entities/things with the Holy Spirit. It is clear Luke understands clearly the different and deliberate distinction he is making. For example, he reports in Luk. 4:14 that "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit and news about him spread through the whole countryside." This is most probably a reference to the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus it safe to conclude Luke was deliberate and sure of what he was writing.

Jesus commissioned his disciples as witnesses of what they had witnessed. But they were to wait in the city for what the Father had promised them. What was promised is the Holy Spirit. But he comes with power from on high (Luk. 24:49). The promise of Luk. 24:49 is repeated in (Acts 1:8). "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

It is likely here that power is the result of the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Power comes when the Holy Spirit comes (*epelthontos*) upon one. Again, we see both Holy Spirit and power as inseparable in operation or manifestations. The coming of power is consequent to the arrival of the Holy Spirit as indicated by the usage of the word "when." Stronstad, with particular reference to Acts 1:8 sees this power not as some separate impersonal force but a manifestation of the Spirit.(Stronstad: 1997) In the same vein he recognizes the close association between the two. He writes:

This close association between the gift of the Spirit and power as we have seen also characterizes the Gospel period. It is for Mary's conception of Jesus

(Luke 1:35), John the Baptist (Luke 1:17) and most importantly, for Jesus (Luke 4:14). The promise of power as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit assures the disciples that Jesus will not abandon them to their own resources. Rather, they will be fully equipped for their tasks as witnesses. Indeed, they will receive the same power by which Jesus executed His earthly ministry. Therefore, just as the mission of Jesus had been inaugurated in the power of the Spirit, so at Pentecost the mission of the disciples will be inaugurated in the power of the Spirit (Ibid: pg 32).

If indeed the power in Acts 1:8 is that of the Holy Spirit, is it the same in Acts 10: 38 with Luke's use of the conjunction *kai* (and). Their inseparability and distinctiveness is made clear in the ministry of Jesus. It reads, "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him" (Acts 10:38)

The text clearly states God anointed Jesus with two entities. The order as Luke records it, is with the Holy Spirit then with power. We may then hold that according to Luke, Holy Spirit comes along side with power. There is no doubt that Luke speaks of the Power of the Holy Spirit. It may mean inherent power of the Holy Spirit. Also, he speaks of the power from on High. This we believe is the power of God. One may contend that when he uses the terms Holy Spirit and Power (Acts 10:38), it is highly probable the power is different from the Holy Spirit. Power comes sometimes as a result of the Holy Spirit. In other words, this power is always associated with the Holy Spirit but not necessarily of or that of the Holy Spirit. All the same, it is a supernatural power. It has God as its source. It is God who gives it and sometimes alongside the Holy Spirit (Luk. 24:49, Acts 1:8). This power is not a person or being for there is no attribute ascribed to it, unlike the Holy Spirit that cannot be lied to and blasphemed (Acts 5:3). None of such is ascribed to power as an entity.

#### **6. Holy Spirit and Power Significance of Christian Service**

One significant truth that is obvious from the survey of the Old Testament and Judaism is the active presence of the Holy Spirit. He is given specially to leaders, artisans. Kings, Prophets, Judges/ military leaders for performance of different assignments. He was given mostly to individuals except in Num. 11:17 when the Holy Spirit was distributed to seventy leaders to assist Moses in the discharge of his responsibilities. In response to Moses' protest, God

distributed some Holy Spirit on him to elders. The distribution is significant in that it foreshadows or models the prophecy Joel (2:28-29) of the last days. Joel foresees the outpouring of the Spirit in power to all without distinction of race, gender, social status and age. (Orgu: 2017). The difference is that the Spirit is not limited henceforth to a group of leaders in the Old Testament period.

Apostle Peter, according to Luke, interprets the prophecy of Joel as not for any particular individuals but for all believers of all generations. (Ibid.) The promised Holy Spirit empowers Christians for service, hence the command for the early believers to wait and be filled with the Holy Spirit and power before venturing into ministry.

What then is the significance of the Holy Spirit and power for Christians today? Two issues are of essence here. One is the model and the second is mandate.

#### **7. The Model for Holy Spirit and Power for Christian Service**

As in all things Christ is the Christians' model. Jesus models ministry of the Holy Spirit or and power. He returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. Interestingly the account in Luk. 4:14ff. marks the commencement of Jesus ministry. While in the synagogue and after reading from Isaiah (61:1-2), Jesus declares that that Scripture is fulfilled in the hearing of his audience. It is a clear indication that Jesus ministry will be characterized with the power. It is a realization of the importance of the empowering Holy Spirit for Christian ministers. It could be argued that if Jesus needed and was filled with the Spirit at the outset of his ministry, all Christians must necessarily follow suit.

Jesus instructed the disciples to wait and be filled with the Holy Spirit before the venturing into ministry. Jesus ministry modeled the continuing ministry by the Holy Spirit and power. His workings of miracles of healing and good deeds were attributed to the Holy Spirit and power. Luke, it seems, sums up the secret of Jesus life and ministry as the Holy and power or in such instances Holy Spirit power (Acts 10:38).

#### **8. The Mandate for Holy Spirit and power for Christians Service**

Jesus' words to his disciples "you will be my witness" are up to debate. Was it a simple statement of fact or a command? Stanly D. Toussaini in the

light of Acts 10:42 believes it is a command.(1983). Peter in the above verse says God has “commanded us” to preach to the people. Similar message is presented as a command in Matt. 28:18. One may not be reading too much into it to construe it as a command given the supernatural power God provided for them and the seriousness with which the disciples went about witnessing the commission. It is therefore mandatory for Christians to be filled with the Holy Spirit and power to make significance impact in ministry.

## 9. Conclusion

The phrase, the Holy Spirit and power is uniquely Lukan. In the parallel passage in Matthew and Luke the Scripture says, “Holy Spirit and fire”, which as has been pointed out are two different theological issues. One is tempted to submit that from Luke’s use of the expression, “Holy Spirit and power”, both are closely related and associated but not identical with each other. This does not deny the power of the Holy Spirit as specifically used in some passages.

Luke sees the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. In Old Testament, the Spirit filled special class of people for specific assignments. In Luke-Acts, the Holy Spirit is the promise of the Father. Peter interprets it universally and for every generation as empowerment for service.

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