**Excursus – The Spirit’s Work in Acts and FBC**

The book of Acts records Christ ascending into heaven and yet continuing to work on earth through the Holy Spirit. Chapter 1 records Christ giving a promise to pour forth the Holy Spirit upon His people, and when it happens in chapter 2, readers see Christ’s people get superpowers. They can suddenly do miracles, prophesy, heal the sick, and the apostles can even raise the dead with shadows (5:15) and remove demons and diseases with handkerchiefs (19:12). All these things happen during the inaugural period of what the prophets called “the last days” (2:17). But because other New Testament authors maintain that we are still living in the last days (1 Cor 10:11; 2 Tim 3:1; 2 Pet 3:3), is there any reason to think that FBC should look any different than those churches in Acts?

It is our understanding that the Holy Spirit’s work in FBC—while similar to the churches in Acts—is not the same. Rather, we believe that the Spirit’s miraculous works in Acts are unique to the apostolic age and that the miraculous gifts served a specific purpose for that specific time that the Bible specifically explains. The case for this is presented in four headings (headings 1–3 will be covered in week one, and heading 4 will be covered in week two):

1. The Promise
2. The Purpose
3. The Performers
4. The Pause

**Day 1 – The Promise**

* The book of Acts begins with Jesus gathering His disciples and commanding them to hurry up and wait for what He calls “the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4). The context clarifies that the promise refers to the Holy Spirit, and if someone is going to understand the role of the Spirit in Acts, they must start—as Luke does—with “the promise.”

The Promise of Power

* The language of “promise” reveals that something was guaranteed in advance. And when one looks for what the promise entails, Luke says that it is a promise of spiritual power.
  + For example, notice how Luke alludes to the promise in 1:4 but does not mention any specific citation. To provide a citation would’ve been easy, but that is not his point. If someone reads *ahead* in Acts, they will discover that the promise refers to what was said in Joel 2 (Acts 2:16–21), but that citation is not given to the reader *at this point in Acts*. Instead, Luke gives other another clue to what he wants Theophilus to be thinking about.
  + Luke records Jesus saying that this is a promise “which you have heard from Me” (Acts 1:4). This language points the reader *backwards* and indicates that Theophilus needed to remember the last time the disciples heard Jesus mention the promise of the Father. Thankfully, it wouldn’t have been that hard; it was just back in Luke 24, when Jesus said, “Behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you” (Luke 24:29a). There, Jesus further defined the promise by saying it refers to a time when “you are clothed with *power* from on high” (24:49b).
  + Luke 24:49 therefore reveals a parallel between the phrases “the promise…upon you” and being “clothed with power,” and this parallel helps readers to see that “The “promise of the Father” is Jesus’ promise of “power from on high” (Luke 24:49).”[[1]](#footnote-1)
* So, according to Luke, Theophilus should have understood that the promise of the Father is mainly a promise of *power*. No wonder Jesus goes on in Acts 1 to say: “you will receive *power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). Jesus is repeating what He said in Luke.

What Kind of Power?

* The context of Luke–Acts clarifies that this “power” refers to the power to perform miracles. In short—superpowers. This can be seen in four ways, all of which track Luke’s own use of the word “power” in the books of Luke-Acts:

1. First, the Greek term for “power” is actually translated as “miracles” in several other places in Luke–Acts (cf. Luke 10:13; 19:37; Acts 2:22; 8:13).
   1. This demonstrates that the term “power” can often refer to “miraculous power” or the specific “power to perform miracles.”
   2. Because this meaning is lexically possible, Acts 1:8 could be translated as “you will receive *miraculous* *power* [i.e. the power to do miracles] when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” And the context of Luke-Acts indicates that this is the correct understanding.
2. Second, the fulfillment of the promise of power is found when Christ’s people receive miraculous powers in Acts 2.
   1. In Acts 2, the Spirit descends upon the disciples of Christ in the form of tongues of fire and gives them the supernatural power to speak in unlearned foreign languages (2:4–11).
   2. When the unbelieving crowd asked for the meaning of the miracle, Peter made it clear that this miracle was proof that the Spirit of God had been poured out upon them as promised (Acts 2:14–17; 33). And since the reader expects the disciples to “receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (1:8), they can understand that this power refers to miraculous power.
   3. As further support, Peter says that the evidence of the Spirit’s arrival was something that the crowd could “see and hear” (2:33), which again supports the idea that the promise of power was a promise to perform miracles that could be seen and heard.
3. Third, Luke helps the reader understand that the miraculous power promised to the apostles in Acts 1 is the same miraculous power that worked in Jesus throughout the Gospel of Luke (Acts 2:22).
   1. The next time Luke uses the word “power” in the book of Acts is over in 2:22, when Peter tells people to remember that Jesus “was attested to you by God with **miracles [lit. works of power]** and wonders and signs” during His earthly ministry.
   2. The connection between Jesus and the apostles is clear because, shortly after saying this, Luke describes the apostles with the same language he used for Jesus. Luke says that the apostles also performed “wonders and signs” (2:42) and did a notable work of “power,” referring to a miracle (4:7).
   3. As further support of this understanding, readers can note how the Gospel of Luke uses this same Greek word for “power” to describe Jesus’ miraculous ministry.
      1. For example, shortly after Jesus received the Spirit at His baptism, Luke describes Jesus as going about “in the power of the Spirit” (4:14) and using His “power” to exorcize demons (4:36) and heal people (4:38–40; 5:20–25). Luke records how even the unbelieving Pharisees recognized that “the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing” (Luke 5:17; cf. 6:19; 9:1).
      2. As further confirmation that “power” is “power to perform miracles,” Jesus begins His ministry quoting Isaiah 61 about how the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him to anoint His ministry (Luke 4:18–19). And later, He cites Isaiah 61 to explain how His *miraculous powers* to heal the sick and exorcize demons demonstrate that Isaiah 61 was being fulfilled (7:18–22).
      3. Beyond this, Acts 10:38 records Peter saying, “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). Again, God’s anointing of the Spirit is synonymous with “power,” and the power shown in the miraculous works of healing those oppressed by the devil (via exorcism).
4. Fourth, later passages in Acts continue to prove that the “power” that comes with the gift of the Holy Spirit refers to the power to perform miracles.
   1. After Pentecost, Peter and John go on to heal a lame man (3:1–10), and he says it was not done in their own “power” (3:12). Instead, Peter explains that it was rather “the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man” (3:16). So clearly, the power working in them is the power of Christ communicated through the apostles by the Spirit.
   2. Later, the Jewish leaders see the evidence of miraculous healing and ask, “by what power, or in what name, have you done this?” (4:7). So the Jewish leaders understood that this “power” was the power to perform miracles.
   3. This is arguably the idea intended later when it says that “with great power [i.e. miraculous power] the apostles were given testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (4:33). And it is clearly the sense intended in Acts 6:8, when it says that Stephen, “full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.” The same goes for Acts 8:13, where Simon noticed the “great miracles [lit. powers] taking place” through Philip, and how Luke says God was performing “extraordinary miracles [lit. powers] by the hands of Paul” (Acts 19:11).

* All this helps to demonstrate that Luke is consistent when he speaks of the “power” that came upon the disciples. It’s the same power that came upon Jesus to empower His miraculous ministry in the Gospel of Luke, and it’s the same power that Luke traces throughout the later chapters of Acts in reference to the miracles done by the people of Christ.

Day 1 – Questions

1. How do you know “the promise of the Father” is a promise of spiritual power?
2. What other word does Luke use to translate the word “power” in Luke-Acts? Why is this important for the current discussion?
3. Summarize the similarity between the Spirit’s empowerment of Jesus in Luke and the Spirit’s empowerment of His people in Acts.

**Day 2 – The Promise (Continued)**

* As we saw above, Luke clarifies that “the promise” of the Spirit refers to the power to perform miracles, but does this include the promise of salvation along with it?
* It may be common to read this language of “giving” or “having” the Spirit (cf. John 7:39) and think that no believer had the Spirit before Pentecost, but that is not a correct way to understand that language. A survey of Luke’s language for the Holy Spirit bears this out.
* Luke clarifies that “the promise of the Father” is synonymous with “the gift of the Spirit” (Acts 2:38; 11:17), the time God “poured out” His Spirit (2:17), and being “baptized with the Spirit” (1:5; 11:16), but are these all synonymous with salvation?
* This section will demonstrate why the gift of the Spirit / the outpouring of the Spirit / and the baptism of the Spirit does not refer to a promise of salvation but strictly to a promise of spiritual empowerment.

**Question 1: Does “The Gift of the Spirit” Refer to Salvation?**

* + ***A Case to Be Made****: In Acts 2, Peter issues a gospel call to an unbelieving crowd, saying, “Repent…and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (2:38). Also, later on, when Cornelius receives “the gift of the Holy Spirit” in Acts 10:45, Peter returned to Jerusalem to report that “God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life” (11:18). Is the gift of the Holy Spirit synonymous with the gift of repentance/salvation?*

**Answer: No; Luke Mentions Believers Who Receive This Gift After Conversion**

* + While Cornelius received the gift of the Spirit at his conversion, this is not true for every convert in the book of Acts. The testimonies are inconsistent, and this alone proves the gift cannot refer to salvation/regeneration. Two examples stand out:
    - **The Samaritans:** Luke says that the Samaritans “believed” the gospel (8:13) and “received the word of God” (8:14), but it wasn’t until the apostles came down from Jerusalem later on that the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit (8:15). In this case, the Spirit was given some time after their conversion.
    - **The Disciples of John the Baptist:** Luke again brings this issue of timing to the forefront when Paul meets some disciples of John the Baptist in Acts 19 and asks, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” and they answer, “No, we have not even heard if the Holy Spirit is being received” (19:2, LSB).[[2]](#footnote-2) This again demonstrates that some people truly “believed” and yet did not receive the Holy Spirit at that moment. They had to wait.
  + Beyond this, Luke does not grammatically tie “the gift of the Holy Spirit” to Cornelius’ *regeneration* but to his ability to *perform* *miracles* as a proof of his regeneration.
    - Note the text: “All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also, *for they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God*” (10:45–46).
    - This is the just like what occurred when the disciples of John the Baptist received the Holy Spirit: “when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, *and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying*” (19:6; cf. Acts 8:11–18).
  + Nothing in these passages proves that the gift of the Spirit is a definitive reference to regeneration. Rather, the grammar and context of these passages indicates that the arrival of the gift refers to a distinct reception of miraculous power.

**Question 2: Does The “Outpouring” of the Spirit Refer to Regeneration?**

***A Case to Be Made:*** *Peter explains the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost by citing Joel 2, where God is said to “pour out” His Spirit in the last days (2:16–17). Elsewhere in the Old Testament, Zechariah promised that God would “pour out” His Spirit upon Israel in the last days as well, and in Zechariah it refers to their regeneration (Zech 12:10). Are these referring to the same event?*

**Answer 2: Not Necessarily; The Outpourings of Joel and Zechariah Are Distinct**

* + When Peter turns to explain the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2, he cites Joel 2, which only refers to the *outward* signs of the Spirit’s empowerment, not to salvation. The emphasis of that text is on the spiritual power to speak/prophesy, not on regeneration (note how Peter even adds “and they shall prophesy” for emphasis in 2:17–18).
    - If Peter were to have cited a passage like Zechariah 12:10 alongside Joel 2, the case for this being a “regenerative outpouring” would be stronger. But when someone asked Peter, “what does this mean?” (2:12), he simply pointed to Joel and said this outpouring of the Spirit was God pouring forth “this which you both see and hear” (2:33)—which indicates that this refers to visible and audible miraculous powers. Again, in line with what Jesus promised, the emphasis is not on salvation but on the miraculous power to proclaim the gospel in unlearned languages so that people from all over the world can hear the good news.
  + If someone were to ask whether the Old Testament itself distinguishes two different outpourings of the Spirit, it must be remembered that Jesus could discern the line between His first and second coming in the middle of a sentence in Isaiah (Luke 4:19). Compared to that, Joel 2 and Zechariah 12 are significantly distinct from one another.
    - For example, Joel 2 focuses on outward signs while Zechariah 12 focuses on inward grief/repentance.
    - Plus, Zechariah 12 guarantees the regeneration of the entire nation—which does not happen in Acts.
  + For that reason, Peter is correct to link the miracle of tongues to the beginning of Joel 2 and not to Zechariah 12. He understands what’s going on.
    - Notably, the outpourings of Joel and Zechariah are distinct, but that doesn’t mean that they *must* therefore be different in time. They can be simultaneous, and one could argue that in the future, they will be. However, they are also distinct enough to allow Peter to say that the events of Pentecost were only a fulfillment of Joel 2 and not of Zechariah 12. (*For a deeper discussion of Peter’s handling of Joel 2 and how it could be fulfilled both in his day and in the future, see the commentary on Peter’s sermon.)*

**Question 3: Does “The Baptism of the Spirit” Refer to Regeneration?**

***A Case to Be Made:*** *Jesus defines the events of Acts 2 as being “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (1:5), and Paul tells the Church in Corinth, “By/in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:13). Because the “body” refers to the church (1 Cor 12:12, 27), and Paul uses baptism language elsewhere to refer to conversion (cf. Rom 6:3), is that what he means in 1 Corinthians 12?[[3]](#footnote-3)*

**Answer: No; 1 Corinthians 12 Is Not Decisive in This Discussion**

* + 1 Corinthians 12 does not define Spirit baptism as regeneration. Instead, it repeats the language of Spirit baptism already laid down in Acts, which is used to refer to the endowment of miraculous powers. This can be seen in two main points (*see Explanation 1 in the appendices for more detail*):
* **Context:** First, the context indicates that Paul is *not* talking to all believers all time, but only to those with spiritual superpowers in Corinth.
  + - * Just before this verse on Spirit baptism, Paul gives a list of exclusively *miraculous* spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4–11). These are the people he’s talking to.
      * Readers need to see that this passage is not about Bob abusing his gift of “helps”—nothing against Bob. This is about a group of people with superpowers who are tempted to act like superheroes and think they’re hot stuff (12:21). They’re tempted to start acting like rivals, but Paul knows they’ve forgotten that they are on the same team. So, he writes verse 13.
    - **Language:** Second, Paul’s language in verse 13—that of being “baptized” “in/by” the “Spirit”—is the same as what is found in Acts 1:8, and there appears to be no reason from the text to think that he is using the language differently than Jesus did in Acts.[[4]](#footnote-4)
      * With that in mind, Paul can be understood to be saying that these super-empowered Corinthians have all come into their roles within their local church body through the same Spirit baptism (1 Cor 12:13, 27).
    - This does nothing to *define* the baptism of the Spirit as the regeneration of the Spirit. The definition of the baptism of the Spirit is given already by Jesus in Luke-Acts and refers to the endowment of miraculous powers.
    - **Should We Seek the Baptism of the Spirit Today? —** If the baptism of the Spirit is distinct from conversion, and sometimes a post-conversion blessing, then should Christians be seeking this experience today (as Pentecostals teach)?
      * It seems that much of this conversation on the baptism of the Spirit revolves around a reaction to Pentecostal teaching—not always a balanced exegesis of the Bible.
      * As an incredibly popular movement, the Pentecostals advocate strongly for the idea that believers should seek a post-conversion baptism of the Holy Spirit which is accompanied by tongues etc. And to argue against that, some have pointed to 1 Corinthians 12:13 to refute the idea that the baptism of the Spirit is a post-conversion act. However, this overstates the case, for Acts records that this baptism *can* *be* a post-conversion act, like it was for the Samaritans. It can also be simultaneous with conversion, like it was for Cornelius (evidently). The timing is not the issue. The nature of Spirit baptism is not even the issue. On those points we could agree. The issue is in the assumption that we need to pray for the baptism of the Spirit today.
      * Pentecostal teaching, true to its name, seems to model the call to pray for this baptism off what the disciples were doing before the Spirit fell in Acts 2. However, Christians are never called to pray for this baptism, and the situation there was uniquely tied to those specific apostles and people living in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). Instead, Christians are called to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18), and “walk by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16), but Luke’s language of being “baptized with the Holy Spirit” is uniquely paralleled with the reception of “miraculous power,” which, as will be shown below, is uniquely tied to the presence of living apostles. Since apostles are no longer alive today, and since they didn’t call us to pray for this, there is no warrant to pray for the baptism of the Spirit.

**Question 4: Is This the Spiritual Regeneration Promised in the New Covenant?**

***A Case to Be Made:*** *The Old Testament prophesied of how one day God would enact a New Covenant under which all His people would be regenerated by the Holy Spirit (Ezek 36:24–27). The New Testament records how Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant at the Last Supper (Luke 22:20) and then promised the Spirit to His disciples (Luke 24:49). Is that promise of the Spirit in Luke and Acts therefore the promise of regeneration mentioned in the Old Testament?*

**Answer: Not Exactly; Regeneration Already Existed in the Old Testament**

* + Here it is necessary to make the distinction between a covenant reality and a spiritual one. Just because regeneration wasn’t part of the “package deal” of the Old Covenant doesn’t mean that it wasn’t a spiritual reality.
  + As has been said, the Old Covenant came “batteries not included.” It provided men all the commands but none of the power to obey them. To be specific, “the batteries” of a new heart were not included *in the Covenant* (Deut 29:4). But that doesn’t mean God wasn’t generously handing out batteries.
    - For example, how does Paul look back on the life of Isaac and have any warrant to say that Isaac was “born according to the Spirit” (Gal 4:29) if regeneration was not a reality until the Upper Room?
    - Or how else would someone like Abraham have “believed God” (Gen 15:6) if his heart was spiritually dead? After all, it is with the heart that someone believes (Rom 10:10). And how could Paul lift him up as a classic example of justification by faith alone if he didn’t have a heart to believe (Rom 4)? Moreover, how could Enoch have “obtained the witness…that he was pleasing to God” (Heb 11:5) if it is true that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6)? Was an unregenerate man “pleasing to God”?
    - Or how does David say, “Oh how I love Your law” (Ps 119:97) and show clear fruit of the Spirit (love) apart from the presence of the Spirit? Are we to believe that the psalms were written by an unregenerate prophet?
  + The answer is that regeneration *was* a spiritual reality, but it was not a *covenant* reality. Saints like Abraham and Moses and Samuel and Sampson and Ruth and Elijah could still be saved and regenerated and come to trust in the gospel; it’s just that the batteries of a new heart were not included for them *in the covenant*. This is why the discussion in Hebrews 8 is all about how God will make a better *covenant* (Heb 8:8–9).The Old Covenant was never a means of salvation and for that reason it was inferior. This is precisely why not every member of the Old Covenant was saved (Jude 5), and why the New Covenant is so much better than the Old—for everyone in it is truly saved (cf. Heb 8).
  + Having said this, it appears that Old Testament saints were saved and regenerated by the Spirit just like New Covenant believers.

So, Did the Apostles Already Have the Spirit in Acts 1?

* The answer to this question depends on what one means by “the Spirit.”
* If, as has been demonstrated above, “having the promise of the Spirit” refers to having a specific “power from on high” to work miracles that validate the gospel (cf. Acts 2:4), then no, they did not yet have the Spirit *in that sense*.
* But if “having” the Spirit means having a regenerated heart, then the biblical answer is yes, they already had the Spirit *in that sense.* The tongues of fire didn’t save anyone when they fell.

Day 2 – Questions

1. Name the two occasions in Acts when someone received the gift of the Spirit post-conversion?
2. What is “the baptism of the Holy Spirit”? Is this something Christians should seek today?
3. In what sense did the apostles already have the Spirit in Acts 1? In what sense did they lack Him?

**Day 3 – The Purpose**

* Having clarified that “the promise of the Father” is a promise of spiritual empowerment (Luke 24:49), it is important to review the general purpose of miraculous gifts.
* It’s important to remember that miracles always mean something and God gives them for very specific purposes. The Bible teaches that the purpose of God giving people miraculous powers is to authenticate a messenger of God and his message.
* This is clear in Acts when the grammar of Acts 1:8 connects the power of the Holy Spirit with the role of witnessing for Christ (“you will receive power…and you shall be My witnesses”).
* However, this purpose was established long before Acts. What happens in Acts is just another example of an ancient pattern at work.

The Pattern: Moses

* + The first example of a “wonder-worker” in the Bible is Moses, and the account of how he received miraculous powers from God is what helps us understand their purpose in the rest of Scripture. (*See Explanation 2 for more detail*)
    - At the time when Moses was an exile of Pharaoh’s house and his people were still in bondage, God told Moses to go declare to the people that it was time to leave Egypt, for God had appeared to him (Exod 3:10, 16). Moses then asked what to do if his people didn’t believe his claim that Yahweh appeared to him (4:1), and at this point God gave Moses three miraculous signs to prove that Yahweh had indeed appeared to him (4:5, 6, 8, 9). From this, it is clear that the purpose of these powers was to authenticate the messenger of God and his message.
    - Beyond this, the same principle is repeated when Moses performs his miraculous signs before Pharaoh. His signs served to prove to Pharaoh that it was time to listen to Moses/Yahweh and let God’s people go (4:21, 23).

Elijah & Elisha

* + Elijah and Elisha were two other prophetic heavyweights in the Bible, renowned for a stockpile of strange miracles.
    - Most important for this discussion, Elijah was authenticated as a prophet of God on Mount Carmel when he was able to pray down fire from heaven to prove—in front of hundreds of false prophets—that his God was the real God (1 Kgs 18:30–40). Here, his miraculous ability served to authenticate him as a true prophet.
    - In a similar vein of attestation, Elisha found his authority and status as a prophet of God mocked and derided by a group of younger boys from Bethel, so he issued them a curse in the name of Yahweh and suddenly “two female bears came out of the woods and tore up forty-two lads” (2 Kgs 2:22–23). Again, the miracle demonstrates that God was with Elisha.

Christ

* + Jesus’ ability to perform miracles also served to authenticate His message.
  + The unbelieving Pharisees of Israel recognized the authenticating purpose of Jesus’ power, for Nicodemus said, “Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:2).
    - Note especially how Nicodemus said the Pharisees knew that Jesus’ signs proved His authority “as a teacher.” Here again readers find that a miracle served to prove a message and authenticate a messenger.
  + The apostle Peter also retold how Jesus’ miracles validated His message when he described Jesus as “a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God did through Him in your midst” (Acts 2:22). The miracles of Jesus served to “attest” and authenticate His legitimacy as a spokesman for God.
  + Importantly, Theophilus could have discovered this for himself simply by reading Luke, as will be shown below:
    - First, Luke explains how, at Jesus’ baptism, the Spirit descended “upon” Him (Luke 3:22, using the same term for the Spirit coming “upon” the apostles in Acts 1:8). Afterwards, Luke goes on to describe Jesus as going about in the “power” of the Holy Spirit (4:14, using the same term used for the “power” that apostles would receive in Acts 1:8). Jesus then opened the word of God and pointed to how the Spirit’s presence upon Him was an endowment of spiritual power that served to advance the gospel. Jesus quotes Isaiah 61, which reads:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me

Because He anointed Me *to preach the gospel* to the poor

He has sent me *to proclaim release* to the captives

And recovery of sight to the blind

To set free those who are oppressed

*To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord*” (emphasis added)

* + It is clear that Jesus saw the Spirit coming “upon Him” as something that “anointed”/designated and enabled Him for His ministry of gospel proclamation. The purpose was for the advancement of the word.
  + As further support of this, the rest of Luke’s narrative in his Gospel explains how the Spirit gave to Jesus the power to work miracles that would draw attention to His message. Time and time again, Luke emphasizes how Jesus performed a supernatural work in a way that drew people’s attention to His message and authority (Luke 4:33–44; 5:20–25; 7:18–22). (*See Explanation 3 for more*)
  + If Jesus’ own baptism and empowerment with the Spirit is any guide to what’s happening with the apostles in Acts, then Acts 2 refers to an empowerment that helps to validate the messengers of God and what they have to say.

Christ’s Apostles & Other Delegates

* + Scripture is also clear that the apostles and other delegates could perform signs and wonders for the same purpose of validating their message.

*The Gospel of Luke*

* + The first instance of this is in the Gospels, when Jesus gave the twelve apostles “[miraculous] power and authority” that is tied to how they were “sent…out to proclaim the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:1–2 reads,

“And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing.” (Luke 9:1–2)

* + Beyond the apostles, Jesus directly appointed seventy other delegates to go forth in His name and witness for Him with miraculous power (Luke 10:1–16). In all these situations, Jesus acts like a force multiplier, enabling others to amplify what He was already doing. The principle with the seventy is the same as it was with the apostles, and the focus is likewise fixed on the proclamation of the word.

*The Book of Acts*

* + Later, at Pentecost in Acts 2, the apostles and others with them received miraculous powers—but note the nature of the power. The power came to them as “tongues like fire” (Acts 2:3), and the design of this miracle should not be overlooked.
  + The use of “tongues” language again puts the emphasis not on the miracle itself but on the advancement of the spoken word. The emphasis is on supernatural speech. Luke explicitly explains this when he said, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began to speak* with other tongues, as *the Spirit was giving them utterance*” (2:4). Again, the miracle’s design and Luke’s explanation shows that the Spirit is giving the power to be “speaking of the mighty deeds of God” in other languages (2:11).

*The Book of Hebrews*

* + Beyond Luke-Acts, the author of Hebrews looks back on the gospel that was preached by Jesus’ delegates and says it was “confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Heb 2:3–4).
  + In other words, God not only worked through Jesus (Acts 2:22), but He also worked through Jesus’ delegates who were uniquely present with Him to hear about His ministry. God did this, Hebrews says, for the purpose of *confirmation*.

The Two Witnesses

* + One of the last examples of wonderworkers in the Bible is recorded in Revelation 11, which describes what God will do during the future tribulation period.
    - During those end times, God will raise up two witnesses and grant them “authority” (Rev 11:3a) and the ability to “prophesy” (11:3b). So, their primary function is to prophesy and speak the word of God.
    - But to accompany that, their miraculous authority serves to validate them as messengers of God, for John goes on to say: “and if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies” (11:5). John also says that they have “power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall [like Elijah, 1 Kgs 17:1]…and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood [like Moses, Exod 4:9], and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire” (11:6).
  + Once again, the point is clear: Miraculous ability is given in order to demonstrate that God’s messengers aren’t simply “all bark and no bite” Rather, God is with them, and God demands that everyone hear what they have to say.

Day 3 – Questions

1. In your own words, why did God sometimes give miraculous powers to His people?
2. What’s a go-to passage for you that helps you see how Jesus performed miracles to validate His message of forgiveness?
3. How does the design of the “tongues of fire” help you see the purpose of the miracle?
4. How do these passages reform your understanding of miracles and wonderworkers?

**Day 4 – The Performers**

* Understanding that first, “the promise of the Father” is a promise of “power from on high” (Luke 24:49), and that second, the purpose of this kind of power was authenticate God’s messengers just like God authenticated Jesus, it now becomes important to notice who in Acts is performing these miracles.
* What readers will see in the text is that the performers of miracles in Acts are (1) the apostles and (2) anyone with whom the apostles were directly involved—either via a miraculous working of God or the laying on of hands.

The Apostles Are Central from the Beginning of Acts

* Even though a variety of people perform miracles in the book of Acts (the 120 at Pentecost, Philip in Samaria, etc.), Luke makes it clear from the beginning that this ability is directly tied to the presence of living apostles.
* Luke introduces the apostles immediately in Acts 1:2 and from that point on, readers see how central they are to the story. And because Luke is trying to get Theophilus to understand the legitimacy of the gospel spreading to Gentiles, it would make sense why he would focus on the apostles. For example:
  + *The apostles* received orders from Jesus in Acts 1:2
  + *The apostles* were said to be chosen by Jesus in Acts 1:2
  + *The apostles* received convincing proofs and appearances from Jesus in Acts 1:3
  + *The apostles* were commanded to stay in Jerusalem in Acts 1:4
  + *The apostles* were promised to be clothed in power from the Spirit in Acts 1:4.
  + *The apostles* were told to go forth as empowered eyewitnesses of the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth in Acts 1:8 (cf. Luke 24:48)
  + *The apostles* witnessed the ascension of Christ in Acts 1:9–11
  + *The apostles* are listed out by name in Acts 1:13
* For this reason, readers should see that Luke’s mention of a large crowd of 120 people was gathered together with the apostles (1:14–15) is not his *literary emphasis*. Some translators even help readers to see this by placing the mention of the 120 in parentheses. The main focus, however, is on the “Acts of the Apostles” (as the book’s name suggests). Readers should be aware of this fact before coming to the Spirit’s outpouring in Acts 2.

The Apostles Are Central at Pentecost

* Having seen how the apostles occupy center stage, readers can now discern their importance in Acts 2. At Pentecost, Luke records the tongues of fire falling from heaven and suddenly a large crowd of disciples is given the miraculous ability to speak in unlearned languages. But throughout this event, Luke places the literary emphasis on the apostles. This can be seen in three ways:

*Peter and the Eleven Apostles Stand Up to Answer the Naysayers (2:14, 37)*

* + When some men from a crowd of unbelieving Jews begin to discredit what’s happening among the disciples, Luke describes how “Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them” the authoritative interpretation of the matter (2:14). And after Peter’s finished, Luke mentions that the crowd responds back “to Peter and the apostles,” asking what they should do (2:37). Throughout the exchange, the apostles are center frame.

*The Apostles’ Teaching is Revered by All (2:42)*

* + After the unbelieving crowd listens to Peter and repents, Luke makes a point to say that everyone was “continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching,” which again platforms the apostles as the ground commanders for this group (2:42).

*The Apostles Continued to Perform Miracles (2:43; cf. 2:22)*

* + While every disciple present spoke in tongues at Pentecost (2:3–4), Luke lands his emphasis back on the apostles when he says that the apostles continued to do miracles afterwards: “and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles” (2:43). So, not only does the text emphasize that this was done “through the apostles”—a critical point for future discussion—but this also ties the apostles tightly to Jesus, who was just described with the same phrase when Peter said that He too did “wonders and signs” (2:22).
  + “The signs of a true apostle” – As another support for the unique tie of the apostles to the miraculous gifts, the apostle Paul later substantiates his own apostolic ministry to Corinth—a church that was waffling in its loyalty to him—by recalling his ability to perform miracles. He says, “the signs of a true apostle were worked out among you…by signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Cor 12:12). This statement shows that signs and wonders were not given to everyone the same, but they were uniquely tied to the apostolic office such that Paul could lean on them as uniquely apostolic credentials. In other words, if everyone could work signs and wonders, Paul wouldn’t be able to say that his abilities were apostolic.
* Having said this, at this point in chapter 2 of Acts, Luke has already given several clues to demonstrate that the apostles have priority in the ministry of miracles. The crowd of 120 also prophesied in tongues, but importantly, the apostles are center frame as Luke tracts the expansion of the gospel from this point forward.

The Apostles Are Central at Other Key Points in Acts

* We know from Acts 1:8 that the gospel was to advance in three stages: Jerusalem🡪Judea & Samaria🡪the ends of the earth. Luke records the spread of the gospel across each frontier, and when he does, he makes a conscious effort to explain the role and involvement of the apostles at each point when it comes to the giving of the Spirit. For that reason, readers can learn a lot about the centrality of apostles when it comes to the ability to perform miracles.

Jerusalem

* + In Jerusalem, as argued above, the apostles are center frame during the outpouring of the Spirit in chapter 2. Importantly, they testify that this power has come straight from Christ (2:33; 4:7–12, 29–30).
    - After Pentecost, Peter and John miraculously heal a lame beggar (3:1–10), and the Jewish leaders admit that “the fact that a noteworthy sign has happened through them [these apostles] is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it” (4:16).
    - The apostles also confess that God is doing wonders through them (4:30).
    - And later on in Jerusalem, Luke again emphasizes that “at the hands of the apostles, many signs and wonders were happening” (5:12).
  + In these three passages, readers can see that the apostle’s unique ability to perform wonders was recognized by their enemies (3:1–10), the apostles themselves (4:30), and Luke as the narrator (5:12).

Judea & Samaria

* + As the gift of the Spirit moves into Judea and Samaria, the text demonstrates that it only did so by the hands and presence of the apostles.
    - In Samaria, God had been working through Philip who was “full of the Spirit” (6:3) and upon whom the apostles “laid their hands” (6:6). Philip went and preached the gospel and worked wonders among the Samaritans (8:6–7), but the text goes on to say that because Philip was not an apostle, he was not able to *give* the Spirit to them. He could work wonders because the apostles had laid their hands on him (6:6), but Luke notes that the giving of the Spirit was above Philip’s pay grade:

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John [apostles], who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they *began* laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14–17)

* + Luke even records a short story afterwards that reinforces the centrality of the apostles:

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit had been bestowed through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, “Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you supposed you could obtain the gift of God with money!(Acts 8:18–20)

* + Luke is making it clear that, while others like Philip had the power to perform miracles, this power was given to him by the apostles alone. And even though Philip had the “power to do” miracles, he did not have the “power to give” them. This text speaks against the idea of an “endless apostolic succession” of empowerment. Instead, as the gift of the Spirit moves into Judea and Samaria, the apostles remain the central movers in that ministry.

The End of the Earth

* + When the gospel spreads outside the bounds of Judea and Samaria and finally reaches to the Gentiles beyond Israel’s borders, Luke again keeps the apostles in center frame to show their involvement in the process. This can be seen in the episode with Peter and Cornelius, as well as the scene with Paul and the disciples of John the Baptist.

*Peter and Cornelius*

* + It was almost a perfect scandal for a Jew to think of the gospel crossing the threshold from Judaism and preach for the Gentiles to be saved *as Gentiles* (i.e. without asking them to become circumcised proselytes of Israel). So for that reason, it makes perfect sense as to why Luke would stress how God chose the apostle Peter to be the lead witness of this development in God’s plan (*See Explanation 4 for more*).
  + When God leads Peter to preach Christ to the Gentiles (10:34–43), he witnesses the Holy Spirit fall upon the Gentiles and authenticate their acceptance before God with miraculous gifts (10:44–49).
    - Granted, the *primary* significance of this outpouring is that it did *not* come through the laying on of hands by the apostles. Rather, like at Pentecost, this was all God (11:15, 18).
    - However, a *secondary* significance of this event, and a major point for our discussion here, is to note that God wanted the apostle Peter to be the lead witness of the whole thing. He didn’t choose “Bob from Damascus”—nothing against Bob. Rather, He wanted an apostle involved, so He gave miraculous gifts in Peter’s presence—not apart from him. This is why Peter’s question, “who was I that I could prevent God’s way?” (11:15–17), is so powerful. He wasn’t a nobody.

*Paul and the Disciples of John the Baptist*

* + Beyond this, there is one more story in which the apostle Paul—ministering out among the Gentiles—is said to lay his hands upon some disciples of John the Baptist so that they could receive the Holy Spirit (19:5–6). At this, those disciples began speaking in tongues and prophesying as a sign that the gift of Spirit had been bestowed upon them (19:6). Once again, Luke is demonstrating to Theophilus that the advancement of the gift of the Spirit (miraculous, authenticating power) comes through the hands and involvement of the apostles.
* In conclusion, Luke demonstrates at several points that the gift of the Spirit does not advance apart from the involvement and instrumentality of the apostles. When Christ poured forth the Spirit in the Jewish and Gentile Pentecosts, the apostles were present and ready to bear witness to it. And when the Spirit was spreading throughout Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, Luke makes clear that it could only come through the apostles as they laid hands upon those who received Him. In every case, Luke makes clear that the gift of the Spirit advanced through the apostles. This is critical for Theophilus to see so that he can know that all of this was legitimate.
  + What about Rome? – Interestingly, later in the New Testament, Paul says that he had never been to Rome (Rom 15:22–24), and yet apparently there are people there who could prophesy (Rom 12:6). So how did they get this gift if the gifts are supposed to be directly tied to the apostles? It would make sense why people with the gifts would be present in a place like Galatia (cf. Gal 3:5) or Corinth (1 Cor 12–14), because Paul had been there himself, but Rome seems to be an outlier. While we’re not told exactly who started the church in Rome and it could’ve been an apostle (15:20), it’s also of note that the book of Acts mentions that “visitors from Rome” were present at Pentecost (Acts 2:10). And when 3000 believers were saved and received the empowering gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38–41), it is *possible* that the prophets mentioned in Romans 12 were present at Pentecost. That said, nothing in the text denies the idea that the apostles were involved, and so the reality of miraculous gifts at Rome does not undermine the current thesis.

# Day Four – Questions

1. Who are the two groups of people doing miracles in Acts?
2. How does the story of Simon help show the reader that only the apostles could bestow the miraculous power of the Spirit?
3. What are “the signs of a true apostle”? How does this help to tie the miraculous power of the Spirit to the apostles?
4. What’s a possible way that prophets got to Rome before any apostle set foot there?

**Day 5 – Summary & Review**

* **The Promise** 
  + **Summary:** 
    - **Power:** From the rest of Luke’s writing, readers can see that “the promise of the Father” (1:4) refers to the promise of spiritual empowerment (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).
    - **Miraculous Power:** From Luke’s consistent use of the term “power” throughout Luke-Acts, readers can see that “power” refers to “miraculous power” or the power to perform miracles (cf. Luke 10:13; Acts 2:22; 19:11).
    - **Not Salvation:** Nothing in Luke’s writing indicates that the promise of the Father / the baptism of the Spirit / the gift of the Spirit / or the outpouring of the Spirit refers to regeneration in the book of Acts. The gift of the Spirit may be given simultaneously with regeneration/conversion (like with Cornelius), but from other examples, it is clear that this gift can also be given after conversion (as with the Samaritans). For that reason alone, the gift of the Spirit cannot *refer to* regeneration. Instead, the passages in view support the idea that this promise refers to a unique empowerment to perform miracles.
* **The Purpose** 
  + **Summary:** 
    - **Confirmation of the Word:** From several different angles, readers can see that miracles always confirm a message. They always support something that is spoken. Since “talk is cheap,” miracles back up how the authority of God is actually behind the messages of His men.
      * **Moses:** God explicitly states that he gave miraculous powers to Moses for the purpose of confirming his message (Exodus 4).
      * **Elijah & Elisha**: These two prophetic heavyweights also perform miracles in a way that authenticates their roles as God’s messengers (1 Kgs 18; 2 Kgs 2).
      * **Jesus:** Jesus explicitly teaches that this is why He healed the paralytic after stating that his sins were forgiven (Luke 5:17–26)
      * **Luke**: Luke explicitly ties the miracles of Jesus to the miracles of His apostles and His other delegates (e.g. the seventy; cf. Luke 9–10; Acts 2:33).
      * **Apostles:** Peter explicitly confirms that this was the purpose of Jesus’ miracles (Acts 2:22). The author of Hebrews explicitly conforms that this was the purpose of both Jesus’ miracles and those of His apostles (Heb 2:3–4)
      * **“Tongues”:** This makes sense of why the miracle of Pentecost appears in the form of *tongues*—because the point is the miraculous confirmation of the spoken word(Acts 2:4, 11).
      * **Two Witnesses:** The apostle John states that the two witnesses who come in revelation were given authority to work miracles to garner attention to their prophecies (Rev 11:3–6).
* **The Performers** 
  + **Summary:** 
    - **A Direct Tie to the Presence of Living Apostles:** The New Testament records several non-apostolic groups with miraculous powers (e.g. the 120 at Pentecost, Acts 2; Philip, Acts 8; the Corinthians, 1 Cor 12–14; etc.). However, from the way Luke writes the book of Acts, he always demonstrates that the gifts were being given or bestowed in connection with the presence of living apostles.
      * A key point to this thesis is the story of Simon, who recognized that the Spirit *only* came to others through the laying on of the apostles’ hands (Acts 8:14–20). There is no “endless succession of apostolic power,” since only the apostles had the power to give miraculous abilities to others.
      * The two exceptions to this are the Jewish and Gentile “Pentecost” events in Acts 2 and Acts 10. At the same time, these are unique demonstrations of God’s plan of redemption moving forward across unique boundaries, and even there, the apostles are central to the witness of these things.

# Day Five – Review

* Review any previous day(s) of your choosing.
* Try to memorize the contents summarized on Day 5.

# Appendices – Explanations

**Explanation 1 – The baptism of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians as the same as the baptism of the Spirit in Acts:**

It is not uncommon to see references to 1 Corinthians 12:13 in the effort to substantiate the idea of a Spirit baptism that occurs invisibly at someone’s conversion—common to all believers and not necessarily accompanied by miraculous gifts. However, the context of 1 Corinthians indicates that Paul’s reference to Spirit baptism bears the marks of continuity with the Spirit baptism found in the book of Acts.

* First, Paul wrote his letters to the Corinthians during the time in Acts when miracles were clearly accompanying the advance of the gospel (Acts 18:1). For that reason, Paul is not necessarily giving counsel to all believers of all time about how they enter the body of Christ. The letter is uniquely situational to the church in Corinth during a time when people spoke in tongues and prophesied and worked miracles (lit. “works of power”; 1 Cor 12:10).
* Second, the scope of Paul’s address becomes clear from the context of what he says—and he is not talking to all believers. Just prior to this verse on Spirit baptism, Paul gives a list of exclusively *miraculous* spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4–11). This point is critical because it helps readers understand that Paul is only addressing this specific group of wonder-working Christians. So, this verse occurs in the middle of a sermon to those with superpowers.
* Third, from the broader context, readers can see that Paul is addressing those unique Christians with spiritual superpowers, and he is writing a point that is exclusively applicable to them.
  + - * From reading the context, it is clear that Paul is writing to do damage control work in a church where some people were abusing their miraculous powers (1 Cor 13:1–2). Readers need to see that this passage is not about Bob abusing his gift of “helps”—nothing against Bob.
      * This is about a group of people with superpowers who are tempted to act like superheroes and think they’re hot stuff (12:21). They’re tempted to become rivals, and Paul knows they’re forgetting that they are on the same team. For that reason, he writes verse 13.
      * In it, Paul uses the same language of being “baptized” “in/by” the “Spirit” as what is found in Acts 1:8, and there appears no reason to think that he is using the language differently than Luke/Jesus.[[5]](#footnote-5) Therefore, he is saying that these super-empowered Corinthians have all come into their visible community via the same Spirit baptism (1 Cor 12:13, 27). This alone does nothing to *define* the baptism of the Spirit as the regeneration of the Spirit. Rather, it helps to demonstrate the idea that the baptism of the Spirit is what formed *this visible group* of wonder-working Christians.
      * The definition of the baptism of the Spirit is arguably given already in Luke-Acts and refers to the endowment of miraculous powers. This understanding makes perfect sense of what Paul is saying to these specific super-empowered Christians. Paul is saying that they need to look past their pride and realize that they all got superpowers from the same Source. They need to realize that they’re not in competition with one another, because they are each given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (12:7). So, rather than competing with each other in pride, they should be unified to each other in love (1 Cor 13).
    - Lastly, when Paul speaks elsewhere about the baptism of the believer into Christ (Rom 6:3) or about the Spirit’s work in sealing us at the moment of conversion (Eph 1:13), these statements do not overturn the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 12 proposed here, which uniquely addresses those with miraculous gifts. Language of the Spirit “sealing” a believer is not a problem to this view, since several things can occur spiritually and simultaneously upon conversion—but this is a discussion about the definition of Spirit baptism, which is a uniquely external reality in Acts. And regarding Romans, some would also say that the use of “baptism” language in Romans 6:3 could refer to water baptism (which normally accompanied conversion) or it could simply serve as a standalone metaphor for the dramatic change that occurs to someone at their conversion.[[6]](#footnote-6) Either way, these terms do not have to define the “Spirit baptism” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

**Explanation 2 – The Empowerment of Moses as the Pattern for Future Empowerments:**

Note how explicit the text of Exodus is regarding the authenticating purpose of Moses’ miracles:

* Moses was an elderly exile from Pharaoh’s house who one day found himself in an unscheduled meeting with God in which God told him, “I will send you to Pharaoh, and so you shall bring My people…out of Egypt” (Exod 3:10).
* God then charged Moses with a message to declare: “Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me’” (3:16). Moses was understandably a bit flummoxed by the whole thing and asked, “What if they [Israel] will not believe me and will not listen to my voice? For they may say, ‘Yahweh has not appeared to you’” (4:1).
* At this, Yahweh gave Moses the ability to turn his staff into a snake, at will (4:3–4). God explains the specific purpose of this power, saying it was given “that [Israel] may believe that Yahweh, the God of their Fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you” (4:5). This passage makes it obvious that the meaning of the miracle is to authenticate the messenger of God and his message.
* God didn’t stop there, though. He went on to give Moses the additional ability to turn his hand leprous and heal it again, at will (4:6). The purpose of this was further confirmation that God was with Moses, for God said, “And so it will be, if they do not believe you or listen to the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of this last sign” (4:8). The reader is here reminded that miracles are always a “witness” to something else.
* But God didn’t stop even with two signs. He goes on to say, “But if it will be that they will not believe even these two signs and that they will not listen to your voice, then you should take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry land; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry land” (4:9). God then told Moses, “When you go to return to Egypt, see to it that all the miraculous wonders which I have put in your hand, that you do them before Pharaoh” (4:21). All these were designed to stand as a witness against Pharaoh and demand his attention so he could hear God say: “Let My son go” (4:23).
* This text serves as the foundation of all future biblical texts related to miracles as later passages carry the same emphasis on this purpose and performing wonders is even how false prophets try to gain the loyalty of Israelites (cf. Deut 13:1–4). If that wasn’t the purpose of the miracle, then they wouldn’t be doing it to try to gain a following. But the Israelites know miracles serve to demonstrate that the speaker has a certain kind of authority that should be recognized.

**Explanation 3 – Jesus’ Authenticating Ministry**

Note how explicit Luke is when it comes to the authenticating purpose of Jesus’ miracles:

* After the Spirit descends upon Jesus at His baptism, and after He calls attention to how the Spirit has anointed Him for ministry, Jesus supernaturally casts demons out of several oppressed people, and Luke is quick to note how this got people thinking on Jesus’ message and the authority behind His word (Luke 4:33–37).
* Soon afterwards, Jesus went on to miraculously heal several others by the power of the Spirit (4:38–40), and Luke says that when crowds came clamoring for His attention, He reminded them that His mission was not centered on healing but on the proclamation of the gospel. He said, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also, *for I was sent* *for this purpose*” (4:42–44).
* Beyond that, when Jesus proclaimed the forgiveness of sins to a paralytic, Luke mentions how some called Jesus’ authority into question. He then describes how Jesus defended His ability to speak that way by commanding the paralytic to get up and walk, which he did (5:20–25). Again, the purpose of the miracle was to validate the message.
* If all this were not clear enough, Luke even records how Jesus, at a later time, cites Isaiah 61 *again* in reference to how His *miracles* authenticate His gospel ministry as the Messiah (7:18–22). In that sense, the Spirit’s empowerment of Christ is clearly evidenced by His miraculous works.

**Explanation 4 – How Luke Platforms Peter’s Apostolic Authority Before, During, and After the Episode with Cornelius**

Note how much emphasis Luke places on Peter’s involvement in the episode with Cornelius:

* To understand why Luke would want to demonstrate that the apostles are behind the gospel passing each threshold (between Judea/Samaria and the ends of the earth), it’s important to remember that the idea of the gospel going to the Gentiles *as Gentiles* (and not Jewish proselytes) was almost a perfect scandal to the average Israelite. Luke even records Peter stating this fact explicitly to Cornelius and his men (Acts 10:28). Peter says to Cornelius and the others in his home, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him” (Acts 10:28). Readers simply can’t miss this.
* Therefore, if *this* threshold is to be crossed—and crossed for Theophilus’ sake—Theophilus needs to know that this was legitimate. It’s no wonder then why Luke takes so much time and ink to explain how thoroughly God is working behind the scenes of this moment, and why it was so important that the apostles were leading this process.
* Consider a few facts:
  + **Before the Event**
    - *God* chose Peter—an apostle from Jesus’ inner circle—to be the one to witness the Spirit being given to the Gentiles. To put it simply, “the apostle Peter” carries extreme clout with the Jewish Christians.
    - *God* authenticated Peter as an apostle just before this story by enabling him to raise Tabitha from the grave (Acts 9:36–43). This is importantly just like how Jesus likewise raised a little girl earlier in Acts (Luke 8:54; cf. with very similar language to Mark 5:41). And so, Theophilus, who would have read both Luke and Acts would have noted the parallel as a key reminder that Peter had the very power of Jesus Christ inside Him.
    - *God* sent His angel to visit Cornelius, the Gentile who receives the Spirit, and instructed him to find Peter (10:5). Peter did not force himself upon Cornelius, and neither was this Cornelius trying to sucker Peter into giving him illegitimate spiritual power.
    - *God* gave Peter a vision just prior to his meeting Cornelius’ men, informing him that He has cleansed what was formerly unclean (10:15). When Peter has questions about what that meant (10:17, 19), the Spirit Himself explains that He has sent Cornelius’ men to meet Peter (10:19–20). And when Peter arrives at Cornelius’ house, he understands the meaning of the vision: “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man defiled or unclean” (10:28).
    - So, at this point, Luke has recorded this story from several important angles to make it clear that God has chosen Peter to play a unique role in the advancement of the gospel to the Gentiles. God is behind this.
  + **During the Event**
    - Readers then see Peter platformed to be the one to preach Christ to the Gentiles, and when he came to the point of offering Christ for the forgiveness of sins, Luke tells us that “the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the word. And all the circumcised believers who came with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and magnifying God” (10:44–46). Peter then affirms that they have indeed “received the Holy Spirit just as we [Jews] did” (10:47). Peter is central in this episode.
  + **After the Event**
    - Even when certain Jews back in Jerusalem take issue with Peter when he recounts the story to them (11:2–3), Peter ties this outpouring of the Spirit back to what happened at Pentecost (11:15–18). In doing so, he demonstrates that this is effectively a “gentile Pentecost.”[[7]](#footnote-7) And importantly for this discussion—just like Peter occupied a position of authority surrounding the events of the first Pentecost, God uniquely chose Peter to be present at this later “Pentecost” as well.
    - Luke also notes how Peter witnessed and bore witness to this event along with six other men (11:12), creating a total of seven, which is a unique number of wholeness or perfection in Scripture. And since Peter is the only one named and the only one bearing witness to this event, these six men serve to lend a literary reinforcement to the authority of *Peter’s* witness. Again, the emphasis skews to emphasize the apostles.

1. Schnabel, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac1.4&off=2696&ctx=s+in+direct+speech.+~The+%E2%80%9Cpromise%E2%80%9D+(%CE%B5%CC%93%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%B3), ZECNT, 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Some translations convey the idea that the disciples did not know that there was a Holy Spirit at all (NASB, ESV, NET). However, this does not seem to make sense with the context of what we know about John’s baptism. For example, John the Baptist himself was the one who foretold that Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16), and so it would be strange for his disciples to have heard nothing of this. For John and his disciples at the time of their earlier baptism, the baptism of the Spirit was something that would happen in the future. But for Paul now in Acts, readers understand that it was now a present reality. So no wonder the disciples of John the Baptist use the present tense in saying “We have not even heard that the Spirit is *being received [at this moment].*” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. MacArthur and Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine*, 357. They write, “Christ *baptizes* the believer with the Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13)…Spirit baptism is exclusively associated with regeneration/salvation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. There is certainly debate about how to understand the verse, and by no means does everyone agree that this refers to Spirit’s work in regeneration. Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, ZECNT, 541, surveys different ideas of how to take the language—including the idea that this is a Spirit-led approach to water baptism—and he ultimately concludes, “there is not much in the text to make it clear which of these alternatives was in Paul’s mind.” In contrast to this, it is better to take Paul’s use of language in stride with how the language has already been used in by Jesus in Acts, especially knowing Luke and Paul travelled together. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. There is certainly debate about how to understand the verse, and by no means does everyone agree that this refers to Spirit’s work in regeneration. Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, ZECNT, 541, surveys different ideas of how to take the language—including the idea that this is a Spirit-led approach to water baptism—and he ultimately concludes, “there is not much in the text to make it clear which of these alternatives was in Paul’s mind.” In contrast to this, it is better to take Paul’s use of language in stride with how the language has already been used in by Jesus in Acts, especially knowing Luke and Paul travelled together. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Thielman, [*Romans*](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcomm66ro?ref=Bible.Ro6.3&off=2733&ctx=he+background)+than+~as+a+metaphorical+re), ZECNT, 304; [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Garland, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac11.15-18&off=588&ctx=+Jews+and+gentiles.+~The+outpouring+of+th), TTTC, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)