


# Glossolalia, Spirit baptism and Pentecostals: Revisiting the book of Acts

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The debate between cessationists and continuationists is one of the main differences between Protestants and Pentecostals. A central tenet of the discussion is whether the baptism of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by signs such as *glossolalia* as described by the *book of Acts*, still occurs today. Most Pentecostals hold that Spirit baptism is distinctive from conversion. The debate is reflected in an article that appeared in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* by Stevanus. This contribution aimed to reflect on their conclusion that it does not occur, based on the exegesis of relevant passages in Acts, but that Spirit baptism and conversion refer to the same experience. It utilised the hermeneutical lenses of the critical-historical method and Pentecostals' reading of the biblical text from their metanarrative of God's ongoing dynamic involvement in the world. Pentecostals emphasise the significance and necessity of continuous authentic charismatic encounters with God to define any doctrine. The study found that a post-conversion experience of the Spirit was normative in Acts and theologically implicit in conversion. It concluded that the Spirit is involved in conversion apart from Spirit baptism, a separate experience empowering disciples for their mission, and the order in which the Spirit reveals divine power to believers does not follow a set pattern.

**Contribution:** The article contributes to a discourse that seldom reaches the academic scene in South Africa but forms a critical element in the difference between Protestant and Pentecostal hermeneutics.

**Keywords:** Spirit baptism; *glossolalia*; continuationism; cessationism; Pentecostal hermeneutics; xenolalia; xenoglossy.

## Introduction

This article is a response to an article published in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(2) in 2023, authored by Stevanus et al. (2023), entitled *A critical study of Pentecostal understanding of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts*. In the article, the author asserts that a study of the *book of Acts*'s text shows that Spirit baptism is not a separate experience apart from conversion. They argue that the Pentecostal view that for their enablement to fulfil their mission, believers need to experience Spirit baptism, in many cases with *glossolalia* as an accompanying sign, does not have a solid theological basis. Instead, it is based on Pentecostals' forced exegesis that interprets the Bible from their charismatic experiences. As a result, Pentecostals teach a doctrine based solely on their personal experiences by using the examples in the early church as a model for the church today. Stevanus et al. (2023) admit that although these experiences may be valid and valuable to the person concerned, they cannot be used to interpret what happened in the early Acts church. On the contrary, they should interpret their charismatic experiences from the biblical data (Stevanus et al. 2023:6).

As a side note, the authors mistakenly assert that Pentecostals argue that the *book of Acts* does not contain any record of the occurrence of *glossolalia*. However, they still practise *glossolalia* even though the author of Acts does not refer to such a phenomenon (Stevanus et al. 2023:6). It is also wrongly concluded that neo-Pentecostals still insist that the experience of being baptised in the Holy Spirit must be confirmed, especially in tongues, excluding classical Pentecostals (Stevanus et al. 2023:4). Although both groups emphasise the continuous experience of Spirit baptism distinguished from the experience of new birth, most classical Pentecostals (instead of neo-Pentecostals) argue that an initial sign of the experience of Spirit baptism is *glossolalia*. Such charismatic experiences are also not limited to the first Spirit baptism experience but can be continuous, as suggested by 1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 13–19. It is not difficult to prove that these are not the views of most Pentecostal scholars. It will suffice to refer to significant representatives such as Sherrill (1964:105–110), Dunn (1975:189), Stronstad (1984:46), Everts (1994:74), Synan

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(1994:75), Menzies (2000:121–144), Horton (2005:186), Menzies (2010:87–113) and Mittelstadt (2010:71).

In the present article, the question is whether *glossolalia* ceased as a sign of Spirit baptism in the *book of Acts* or whether *glossolalia* reoccurred in the early church in continuity with the Acts 2 occurrence. Another question is whether Pentecostals' assertion is true that their experience of Spirit baptism is in line with Acts' descriptions of this experience. The argument develops by looking at the occurrences of charismatic incidents recorded in the *book of Acts* before referring to other references to Spirit baptism and *glossolalia* in the New Testament.

The term 'baptism in the Spirit' occurs only a few times. John the Baptist used it to describe Jesus' ministry (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33). Jesus quoted John's prophecy, looking forward to Pentecost (Ac 1:5). On the day of Pentecost, the process of Spirit baptism was initiated (Ac 2). In Acts 11:16, it is used by Peter to refer to Jesus' quote of John's prophecy. And in Romans 6:1–4 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul taught its significance to believers (Barton & Osborne 1999:23).

## Research methods and design

The article critiqued utilised the critical-historical method as a hermeneutical lens to uncover the essence and message of Acts and the author's background. For that reason, it is also employed in this study. Historical studies endeavour to find the text's relevance and meaning (as far as it is possible), the aims, objectives and theological reflections (Kinsella 2006:1). It sees the need for critically scrutinising politics, culture, economy and social life by utilising cultural and linguistic methods focused on questions of identity and class. Critical-historical studies are an innovative approach to historical transformations in vigorous dialogue with other theoretical currents that explore connections between cultural and political change and overarching transformations in socioeconomic contexts (Goswami et al. 2014). It includes a reflective historical critique of the conditions of possibility for the inquirer to engage in the inquiry, aimed at a reasoned clarification of the meanings and implications of practices and institutions to evaluate institutions, ideas and practices (Kinsella 2006:44).

The other hermeneutical perspective used to interpret the text is a Pentecostal way of looking at the text from current charismatic experiences. This approach is rooted in and guided by Pentecostal identity, by concentrating on the horizon of the biblical text and the methods to interpret it in the light of the present horizon of the reader in the community (Archer 2009:3). Pentecostals experience divine encounters; to designate these experiences, they turn for help to the early church in their encounters with the Spirit. In this way, narrative descriptions of the early church's experiences and current charismatic encounters inform each other. Keener (2016:32) writes that the reason God gives us Scripture along

with the Spirit is to provide a more objective guide and framework for our personal experiences with God. Hence, listening to the Bible experientially and personally is inevitable and not in necessary conflict with reading the Bible in a way that respects the original message and context. Their Bible reading method uses the same biblical interpretive method as the Wesleyan and Keswickian holiness movements, centred on the faith community's dramatic metanarrative of God's dynamic involvement (Archer 2009:6). They emphasise the significance and necessity of continuous authentic charismatic encounters with God as a condition for defining any doctrine. By incorporating a critical-historical (not historical-critical) approach to interpreting the text, Pentecostals will conform to the need for universally acceptable rational foundations for their theological endeavours that stand apart from the evangelical tradition with its central tradition of continuationism.

## Evidence from the *book of Acts*

On the one hand, Stevanus et al. (2023:2–3) support conservative Evangelical theologians following in B.B. Warfield's footsteps who accepted the reality of the miracles recorded in the New Testament but did not expect them to occur today (Ruthven 1993:41–111). On the other hand, Pentecostals read the narratives of Jesus' and the early church's miracles as a road map to inform their own practice of *charismata*, divine healing and exorcism. They believe that the 'signs and wonders' that follow their faith restore the charismatic character because of Spirit baptism that defined the early church. The longer ending of the Mark, which most New Testament scholars do not accept as original to the book, describes it.<sup>1</sup> In Menzies' opinion, Pentecostal hermeneutics is not overly complex or overconcerned with questions about historical reliability, textual criticism or the supposed incompatibility between biblical and contemporary worldviews. It is much more straightforward and simple, taking the Acts narratives as 'our' stories that shape their identity, ideals and actions (Menzies 2012:48).

Stevanus et al. (2023:5) conclude from their study of the events of the descent of the Spirit in the *book of Acts* that the reception of the Spirit was not absolute and included two groups, the Jews and Gentiles. Its purpose was to illustrate Jesus' command's fulfilment to take the gospel from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and the ends of the earth (Ac 1:8) and implies, in their opinion, that the manifestation of speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost was unique and an 'exception'. Therefore, Acts 2 cannot serve as a model for the life experiences of the current church. Evidence from Acts demonstrates that *glossolalia* is not an experience for every Christian. Instead, all Christians receive Spirit baptism (or Spirit fulfilment) at the moment of their conversion.

1. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will expel demons, they will speak in new tongues, they will pick up snakes (some manuscripts add 'with their hands'). And if they drink any deadly poison it will never hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick and they will get well' (Mk 16:17–18).

Furthermore, the team argues that contemporary interpreters cannot develop doctrinal assumptions from historical narratives found in the Bible because if they are not careful, they will end up reading their own experiences in the biblical narratives. Then, they interpret the narratives from what they view as the Spirit's work in their lives. The authors refer to Walston (2003:151), who adds that the occurrences in Acts cannot serve to justify tongues as the (only) sign of Spirit baptism because one misses the authorial intent behind those passages, based on the entirety of the book, that shows that Luke's predominant intent in referring to Spirit baptism was soteriological in nature (Walston 2003:59). He argues it is imperative to remain cautious when developing doctrinal positions from historical narratives because they serve only to show what transpired for others in historical events (Walston 2003:145). Hence, Luke's inspired narratives did not intend to be prescriptive or didactic in nature, and they do not significantly demonstrate that speaking in tongues is the norm for Spirit baptism (Walston 2003:151).

Christenson (1987:126) responds to such arguments by emphasising 1 Corinthians 14:1's command to pursue love and simultaneously desire spiritual gifts, underlining the need to 'earnestly' seek and desire charismata. Otherwise, he argues, they will probably never manifest. 'Speaking in tongues is essentially an act of faith. An act of faith involves two things: the act of the believer and the response of God' (Christenson 1987:126).

Harvey's (2012:12) balanced view holds that believers should always evaluate contemporary manifestations of *glossolalia* and the other charismata against Scripture to determine whether the charismatic experience is authentic. While it is true that experience contributes to reading the Bible, the fine distinction should be upheld that charismata (including prophecy; 1 Cor 13:9–12; 14:2–5) should always be subjected to relevant biblical witnesses, including the need to distinguish the usefulness of the effect of the gift on the faith community. Experience should always be weighed against the test of Scripture. Because the Bible attests to the early church's acceptance and practice of *glossolalia*, Paul distinguishes the implementation and use of *glossolalia* within the body of believers and as a private prayer tongue, implying that the church may expect these manifestations of the Spirit to continue occurring. While it is true that the biblical revelation as God's revelation is final, the early church, like Pentecostals, expect further divine revelations relevant to their situation, including words of affirmation (Harvey 2012:12).

Whether all believers should expect to speak in tongues as evidence of their Spirit baptism is unclear from Scripture. However, it seems that all believers must earnestly desire and seek the heart of God for the manifestations of the Spirit to be faithful to Paul's exhortation. Next, it is necessary to scrutinise references to Spirit baptism in the *book of Acts* to compare with Stevanus et al.'s conclusions.

## Acts 1:6–8

Hodges (1978:28–31) interprets Acts 1 as a missiological bridge that takes the ministry of Jesus to uncharted territory, enabling the church to write Acts 29 in Marek's (1989:24) words. Marek sees a connection among three words in Acts 1–2: illustrate, witness and prayer. To the disciples' inquiry when the Kingdom of Israel is to be restored, Jesus responds that they are not permitted to know the Father's decisions about times and periods. However, he replaces their inquiry with another relevant subject, their task in the interim period while the kingdom comes (Polhill 1992:84). Jesus accepts the disciples' concept that Israel is to be restored; however, he 'depoliticised it with his call to a worldwide mission, emphasising that the Spirit is the defining presence of the new age' (Holladay 2016:74). Disciples are called to be Jesus' witnesses to the ends (or farthest parts) of the earth (Lk 24:48). To accomplish that mission, they will be endowed with the Spirit's power (Ac 1:6–8) to be witnesses (*martyrs*; in later Christian literature, the word received the sense of 'martyr', one who bore testimony even to death). In Acts, they witnessed Jesus's earthly ministry, above all, his resurrection (cf. 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41), guaranteeing the authenticity of the resurrection. The root meaning of *testimony* has an almost legal sense of bearing testimony to Christ, illustrated by Stephen's (Ac 22:20) and Paul's remarks (22:15; 23:11; 26:16). The background is Isaiah's servant psalms, with God calling his servant to be a witness (Is 43:10; 44:8) (Polhill 1992:86).

Pentecost followed the disciples' continuous united prayers, and as displayed in Acts 3–28, their witness followed Pentecost (Ac 2). Hence, Luke transfers the responsibility for preaching the gospel to the disciples. And the church born on the day of Pentecost bloomed because the disciples, who had received adequate mentorship and experience from the Lord, now experienced the accompanying power of the Holy Spirit. For that reason, their mission was successful in reaching the ends of the earth (Mittelstadt 2010:93). Acts 1:8 calls believers God's agents for mission empowered by the Spirit, like Luke's other key programmatic texts also suppose (Lk 4:18–19; 24:45–48; Ac 2:17–18) (Keener 2020:105), and serves as a rough and asymmetric outline for the rest of Acts that introduces book's major themes (2020:17).

In addition, Luke links missions and ecclesiology, as demonstrated by Luke's use of *homothumadon* (Ac 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 8:6) and *proskartereo* (Ac 1:14; 2:42; 2:46; 6:4; 8:13), to continue steadfastly and in one accord, serving as parallel criteria for church growth (Munyon 1991:10). In a similar way, Williams (1988:29) and Amstutz (2007:220) find in Acts a model for church growth, based on components of the newly formed ecclesiological community widely appreciated because of its visible expressions of God's love, conducive structure, priesthood and prophethood of all believers, expanding base of leadership, indigenisation, cultural sensitivity, strategic focus on receptive people and the focus upon the multiplication of disciples.

## Acts 2

Acts 2 repeats the missiological motif characterising Jesus' farewell words in 1:6–8. Jews celebrated Pentecost during *Shavuot* or the Festival of Weeks, the wheat harvest in May or June, on the 50th day after Passover. As one of the three major Jewish annual festivals, many Jews gathered in Jerusalem for its celebration (Holladay 2016:91). This was the setting for Acts 2.

The Spirit's coming is accompanied by a sound that filled the house (v. 2), divided (or distributed) tongues that appeared and rested on each of them (v. 3) and their response of speaking in other tongues (v. 4). Barton and Osborne (1999:23) remark that fire had come down at Mount Sinai in one place and on one person; at Pentecost, it came down on all believers, symbolising that God's presence is available to all. Fire and wind also reflect images of end-time restoration (Ezk 37:5–10; cf. Jn 20:22), used because they associate with biblical theophanies (Ex 3:2; Dt 4:24; 2 Sm 5:24; Job 38:1; Ps 29:3–10; Is 29:6; 66:15). The same natural phenomena accompanied the giving of the Mosaic law on Mount Sinai (Ex 19:16–25). The Greek *pneuma* connotes both wind and Spirit, clearly at play in the references to the sound of the wind and the Spirit's outpouring (vv. 2, 4).

Since the 2nd century CE, the rabbinical tradition associated the Feast of Weeks with the giving of the law at Sinai. Some scholars find in the description of Acts 2 a portrayal of Pentecost as a counterpart to Sinai. Pentecost implies a new people formed, like Israel, who saw their identity in the Egyptian deliverance and Sinai events. Now, the Spirit replaced the *Torah* as the governing norm of the newly formed people. For that reason, Keener (2020:122) calls Pentecost a covenant renewal festival connected with the giving of the law. However, Holladay (2016:90) rightly argues that there is no firm evidence for any law-Sinai-Pentecost-Spirit linkage.

The lapping flames over the participants look like tongues and enable inspired speech. Fire phenomena depicted the divine presence (cf. Ex 3:2; 19:18; 1 Ki 18:38–39; Ezk 1:27). The fire 'separated' or 'divided' implies that the Spirit separates into many tongues of flame resting on everyone. The tongues (*glōssa*) represent a miracle of speech, indicated by 'as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak out' (καθὼς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐδίδου ἀποφθέγγεσθαι αὐτοῖς, rendered literally 'as the Spirit gave them utterance'). The Greek ἀποφθέγγεσθαι refers to 'to speak one's opinion plainly' or 'to speak with emphasis', although it is also frequently used to refer to ecstatic speech (Peterson 2009:135). The implication of the narrative emphasises that the event was audible, visible and manifested in distinctive speech (Polhill 1992:97). Tongues refer to both the physical organ of the tongue and (metaphorically) spoken language.

Verse 4 explains what follows next. The believers are 'filled with the Holy Spirit' and speak in unknown languages that the crowd speaks, qualified as 'God-fearing' (ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς),

a group of faithful Jews that gathered to observe the strange phenomenon (2:6–11). Verse 11 groups proselytes, representing Gentile converts to Judaism, and Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι) together. The *xenoglossy* or *xenolalia*, whether the miracle of their speaking or the crowd's hearing, does not refer to *glossolalia*, the ecstatic 'Spirit languages' of 1 Corinthians 12–14. In both cases, the effect is the same when some bystanders call the believers drunk because of speaking 'gibberish' and 1 Corinthians 14:23's remark, 'out of you minds'. The difference between the 'tongues' of Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12–14 is, according to Keener (2020:128–129), that Paul sees the private and public (if accompanied by interpretation) devotional use of tongues as building up believers. However, Luke associates it with the theme of prophetically endowed worldwide evangelism.

Interestingly, verse 4b uses an uncommon Greek word, 'as the Spirit enabled them', meaning 'to utter, declare, speak with gravity' and used in the Septuagint for prophesying (cf. 1 Chr 25:1; Ezk 13:9; Mi 5:12) (Barton & Osborne 1999:28). Filled with the Spirit, believers speaking in tongues prophecy about God's great deeds (v. 4). In the Old Testament, being possessed by or filled with the Spirit led to prophecy (as in Nm 11:26–29; 1 Sm 10:9–10; 2 Sm 23:2; Is 61:3). On the day of Pentecost, it led to *glossolalia*. However, the effect is the same because the inspired speech proclaims the great deeds of God (v. 11). Delivered from the limitations of their Galilean distinctive dialect, the disciples praised God so that each hearer recognised their language (Peterson 2009:134).

Peter responds to the accusation that the believers are drunk. He stands with the eleven apostles (including newly elected Matthias) and explains that they are experiencing the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. Peter 'raised his voice', a semitic expression, and 'declared', implying that he speaks seriously, with gravity, a term connected to prophetic, inspired utterance (Polhill 1992:108). The 'third hour' (v. 15; 9 o'clock) is a customary Jewish prayer time. Traditionally, Jews enjoyed something to eat only from the fourth hour. The third hour is not the time to find drunken people, especially not during a solemn feast day like Pentecost. What the crowd see was instead the outpouring of the Spirit as Joel predicted (2:28–32) [LXX, 3:1–5]), a prophecy that followed a locust plague that destroyed the harvests and created a famine. The prophet called the people to repentance, promising the coming of the day of the Lord with the Spirit poured out on all of Israel. Joel's prophecy begins with 'afterwards', changed by Peter to 'in the last days', introducing the messianic age with Christ's resurrection and implying that believers live in the final days of saving history. The rabbis asserted that the Spirit of prophecy left Israel but would return in the last days, demonstrated when 120 believers received the Spirit at Pentecost.

Acts 2's metaphorical language portrays the transcendent beyond ordinary human experience in earthly analogies. Hence, Chan (1999:210) argues that the essence of Spirit baptism is to step out of the mundane world into a different world, leading to the willing suspension of unbelief. The

purpose of Spirit baptism is divine enablement and empowerment within a transformative encounter with the living God (Mittelstadt 2010:77) that leads to effective witness, illustrated by Peter's proclamation (2:14–36).

The last remark is attributed to Shuman (1996:95–96), who describes Pentecost as an eschatological event that reversed the divisions of Babel between people. *Glossolalia* symbolises new possibilities for harmonious social and political coexistence, contrasting with Babel as a prelude to interhuman violence. *Glossolalia* is not limited to using different ecstatic languages because it established a new community with the potential for people from diverse backgrounds to coexist in love, peace and harmony. In like manner, Peter employs Joel's prophecy of a great multitude beyond numerical comprehension from every nation, tribe and language (cf. Rv 7.9) as the citizens of a new heaven and earth, an alternative community of Spirit-filled believers spirited with a peaceable vision of divine reign not bound by national allegiance.

## Acts 8:14–17

Samaria is the next destination of the church's mission, according to Acts 1:8, after reaching Jerusalem. Barton and Osborne (1999:139) refer to the historical deep-seated hostility between Jews and Samaritans, with Jews looking down on the Samaritans for not being pure Jews (descendants of the intermarriage of Israelites and Gentiles). From their side, Samaritans resented Jews for their arrogance. The situation required an apostolic presence before accepting the Samaritans in the new faith community (Barton & Osborne 1999:140). When Peter and John lay their hands on the Samaritans, it was a gesture of apostolic solidarity and fellowship with them that lifted fixed boundaries (Polhill 1992:218). Placing one's hands on people is a ritual gesture that signifies the commissioning of duly appointed representatives, the transferral of power, especially healing power, and the bestowal of the Spirit (Holladay 2016:185). The magician Simon recognised the ritual's value and thought it implied an ability the apostles shared.

Persecution against the church in Jerusalem led to the disciples being scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (v. 1). Hence, Philip came to a city in Samaria, proclaiming Christ with signs of exorcism and healing (v. 5–8). When many accepted his message, the apostles sent Peter and John to pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit (vv. 14–17). Holladay (2016:185) asks why the Samaritans did not receive the Spirit as a baptismal gift, as did the Pentecost crowds (2:38), and finds the answer in the remark in verse 16 that they had only been baptised in Jesus' name. He suggests it signifies different levels of ministerial empowerment. By implication, Philip, as one of the Seven, did not have the authority to confer the Spirit, the Twelve's exclusive apostolic prerogative. However, the text does not present the possibility of such an interpretation; instead, the author suggests that the Spirit had not fallen on them (v. 16) as the free decision of the Spirit.

A clear visible manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit accompanied the Samaritans' reception of the Spirit, possibly in like manner as Acts 2's description of a violent wind and tongues of fire, because a magician, Simon, offered the apostles money to impart their power to him to bestow the Spirit (vv. 18–19). The text does not state what it consisted of and does not relate whether Simon also received the Spirit, but it can probably be assumed that he did not, given his response as a mere onlooker rather than a participant. However, as a professional, Simon was impressed with the commercial possibilities of what he had witnessed (Polhill 1992:219). Speaking in tongues was probably the evidence of Spirit baptism he saw, even though not mentioned (Wagner 2008:160), because any other natural phenomenon might have led to the author describing it.

Polhill (1992:217) remarks that according to Acts, baptism was closely linked to the receipt of the Spirit. Clearly, the author interprets Spirit baptism as an essential element of the normative experience of conversion and commitment to Christ, with repentance, Spirit baptism and (water) baptism closely joined together (as in the case of Paul, 9:17–18 and Cornelius, 10:44–48). Polhill acknowledges that this is not always true, as the experience of John's disciples in Ephesus shows. They were first baptised and only later received the Spirit when Paul laid his hands upon them (19:5–6). He admits that Acts does not present a set pattern. Still, he argues that the Samaritan Pentecost refers to an exception representing a major stage of salvation history that required the Spirit's visible manifestation as a sign of the divine approval of this missionary step beyond Judaism. However, its exception does not imply that Spirit baptism and conversion are two elements of the same experience. For some people, Spirit baptism precedes baptism and for others, it follows because the Spirit cannot be tied down to any manipulative human schema (Polhill 1992:218). Indeed, Acts 8:14–17 is a favourite text for those who teach that Spirit baptism is a second work of God's grace subsequent to salvation, as Wagner (2008:159) states.

Keener (2020:264) remarks that although Luke associates the Spirit with conversion (as Ac 2:38; 10:44–48; Lk 3:16 illustrate), his focus on Spirit baptism sees it as something else, empowerment for mission (Ac 1:8; 2:17–18). Therefore, it is not important exactly when believers receive the Spirit. It can be before (10:44), sometime after (8:16–17) or very soon after (19:5–6) baptism. Luke does not impose his 'theological grid for Spirit reception' upon all believers' experience (Keener 2020:265–266). What is vital to recognise is that while conversion initiates believers into the life of the Spirit, they require an additional encounter that empowers and enables them for their mission that entails the new life they have received in Christ.

## Acts 10:44–46

Acts 10 relates a vision Peter saw and his subsequent visit to the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion living in Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea and hence a symbol of Gentile

power and Jewish oppression (Holladay 2016:240). The vision showed Peter that God does not show favouritism but accepts people from every nation who fear him and do what is right (10:34–35). Simon was a devout and God-fearing Roman who served the Jews' God with all his household (10:2). Peter explained to the family that he witnessed Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection (vv. 39–40). While he was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell (aor. act. indic., conveying a single, discreet action in the past) on the listeners, and they spoke in tongues and glorified God (vv. 44–46). Peter responded by ordering the new converts to be baptised (v. 48), although Cornelius and his household had not as yet openly professed faith in Jesus. Still, the Spirit enabled them to respond appropriately to the gospel (Peterson 2009:339). Again, the purpose of tongues is to glorify God (λαλούντων γλώσσας καὶ μεγαλυνόντων τὸν θεόν). Peterson (2009:341) states succinctly that the *xenolalia* of Acts 2, where people understood the disciples' speaking in various languages unknown to them, is not repeated in 10:46 and 19:6. He argues that these occurrences of *glossolalia* are the same phenomenon as described in 1 Corinthians 12–14, which required interpretation. However, this is stating more than the text describes.

Again, Polhill (1992:264) describes the event as scarcely programmatic, 'a unique, unrepeatabe event', like Acts 2's Pentecost because of the sequence, with the Spirit coming before their baptism. Next to the Judean and Samaritan Pentecost, this event represents the Gentile Pentecost. He implies that each occurrence of Pentecost is unique; it does not imply that it will become a common pattern in the future. While the Samaritan believers had to wait for a while between belief and Spirit baptism (8:17–18), the Spirit fell on Peter's listeners as on the day of Pentecost, without laying on of hands or praying for the Spirit to fall (Barton & Osborne 1999:183).

The Jewish Christians accompanying Peter (called οἱ ἐκ ᾤριτομῆς ᾤστοὶ ὅσοι συνῆλθαν τῷ Πέτρῳ) were astonished (ἐξέστησαν, literally, 'beside themselves'), not that the Spirit fell on people but to see the events of Pentecost repeated among Gentiles (καὶ makes it clear that what was unexpected was ἐπὶ τὰ ἔθνη) (Kellum 2020:133). The Judean believers carried the physical badge of membership in Israel's covenant community, and they were not prepared for the divine demonstration of uncircumcised Gentiles' full and equal status in the faith community (Peterson 2009:340). They might have been tempted to doubt whether Gentiles would be baptised in the Spirit if the experience were not accompanied by the clear sign of speaking in tongues.

At first, Peter was hesitant and reluctant to reach out to or enter the house of Gentiles, like most conservative Jews. Only the evidence of the Spirit's pouring out on the Gentiles who demonstrated God's choosing of them could overrule Jewish Christians' objections. The response of the Gentiles listening to Peter's proclamation, sealed by their experience of Spirit baptism, convinced Peter that God gave them the same gift as Jewish believers who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, as

he later explained to the sceptical believers in Jerusalem: 'who was I to be able to hinder God?' (11:16). For that reason, Peter stated that indeed no one could withhold baptism for people who have received the Holy Spirit (v. 47). A similar expression is used in 11:17 (δυνατὸς κωλύσαι, 'able to forbid') regarding opposing the divine will (τὸν θεόν). 'The sign of God's purpose in that context is once again the giving of the Spirit to the Gentiles' (Peterson 2009:340, n. 66). However, it is ironic that Peter did not baptise them himself but committed the task to those who had accompanied him (Polhill 1992:265). The narrative ended with Peter being asked to stay for several days, implying that he would eat with them, something unheard of among faithful Jews. Peter complied and celebrated their shared participation in Christ and the benefits of their newly shared salvation in table fellowship (Peterson 2009:341).

Back in Jerusalem, the other leaders called him to account for entering the house of Gentiles and staying and eating with them (11:1–3). He related his early reluctance to obey the voice in his vision because of his unwillingness to associate with Gentiles, his eventual obeying of the Spirit, his preaching of the gospel and the success of his mission (vv. 4–17). His listeners became silent (ingressive aor.) when they heard what Peter told them – how the Spirit fell on these heathens when he started speaking – and they praised God for granting repentance leading to life also for Gentiles. A new ethnic group, the pagan nations, had entered the church (cf. 11:1 with 8:14) (Witherington 1993:146).

## Acts 19:1–7

On the one hand, Ervin (1985:71), in response to Dunn (1970:71), provides an exegetical defence to challenge Dunn's exegesis of Pentecost (Ac 2), Samaria (Ac 8), Paul's conversion (Ac 9), Cornelius' conversion (Ac 10) and the Ephesian disciples (Ac 19). Dunn assumes that the experience of salvation and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit refer to the same event. In contrast, Ervin argues that Luke meticulously keeps the two experiences apart. Ervin finds that in Acts, conversion leads to the experience of the forgiveness of sins, atonement with God and spiritual peace. On the other hand, reception of the Spirit occurs subsequent to conversion and equips believers with supernatural spiritual *charisms* that change them into evangelistic signals of divine power. The differences in the order of believers' Spirit encounters suggest that Luke refers to separate experiences when he refers to conversions and Spirit baptism.

In Acts 19, Paul's missionary journeys led him to Ephesus, the provincial capital, where he found twelve disciples (males, implying a considerable number of family members with them). 'Disciples' means students or learners (Keener 1993:Ac 19:1). Although some argue that 'the twelve' recalls the twelve apostles to demonstrate geographic and temporal continuity in the work of the Spirit (Keener 2020:470), this is unclear from the text.

Ephesus became the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire during the first century because of its location on several important land and sea routes and the temple to the Greek goddess Artemis (Diana is her Roman equivalent) located outside the city, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The temple cult served as a financial boon, with many tourists visiting the city during the multiple religious festivals for Artemis (Barton & Osborne 1999:324).

When Paul inquired whether these disciples (τινας μαθητάς) had received the Spirit when (if the participle is interpreted as temporal) they believed, they replied in the negative. Grimes (1986:29) argues that a proper translation of the question (19:2) Paul posed to the disciples requires, 'Have you received the Holy Spirit *since and/or after* you believed?' instead of 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit *when* you believed?' Such a translation is also possible. Aker (1988:112) agrees and argues that Luke's view of post-conversion Spirit baptism aligns with Jesus' experience at the Jordan (Lk 3:21–22). He writes that Jesus' Spirit anointing at the river was not an endowment based upon Jesus' need; instead, it anticipates Jesus' promise and eventual release of the Spirit upon his disciples. It would later serve as the foundation for Peter's explanation of the pouring out of the Spirit with the accompanying signs in Acts 2:33.

The tense of πιστεύσαντες ('you believed', aor. act.) in 2:4 indicates the possibility and even necessity of receiving the Spirit after conversion (Kellum 2020:216), in line with Acts 8:14–16 where believers did not receive the Spirit until Peter and John prayed for them and laid hands on them (cf. 19:6). It suggests that a post-conversion experience of the Spirit is normative, as attested to in Acts 8:12–17 (cf. 2:4; 9:17; 19:5–6); it is also theologically implicit in conversion (Ac 2:38–39; 11:16–17; cf. Lk 3:16) (Keener 2020:104). It is also true that some dimensions of the Spirit's work available in conversion and Spirit baptism might subsequently be more fully experienced at later stages. Clearly, in Acts, there is no set pattern for Spirit baptism to occur, with the Spirit coming at various times and in multiple ways (Polhill 1992:400). The only consistent element throughout is that early believers experienced Spirit baptism; their initial commitment to Christ did not end with conversion and (water) baptism.

The question of whether they received the Spirit when they first believed probably referred to their conversion if 'disciples' refer to 'Christians', as Menzies (1991:271) thinks. When it is kept in mind that the term 'disciples' (μαθητης) is extensively used in Luke Acts for Christian disciples, it might be that they were Christians (Peterson 2009:529), a view supported by Holladay (2016:366). However, the Johannine disciples replied that they had not even heard of the Spirit because they were baptised into John's baptism. Given that they knew nothing about the Spirit and had to be rebaptised, it suggests an incomplete knowledge of Jesus to the degree that it can be doubted whether they were converted (Kellum 2020:217). Keener (2020:470) agrees and argues that those disciples baptised under John who received the Spirit baptism did not require rebaptism, like the early disciples

and Apollos. But those who had not received the Spirit (like those here) should be rebaptised because they did not realise that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance to prepare for the coming of the Messiah (Lk 3:3–14). When Paul proclaimed Christ as the reason for John's ministry, they were (re)baptised in Jesus' name.

Paul then placed his hands on them, and the Spirit came upon them. Acts 19 relates the only example where hand-laying directly follows baptism. Menzies (1991:271) argues that Paul commissioned them as fellow workers in the church's mission through the laying on of hands, while Barton and Osborne (1999:325) speculate that it might have been either to greet them as brothers and sisters or as a final part of the baptism rite. But this is probably not the case. Instead, it emphasises that the Spirit enabled and empowered them for their life and mission as believers (Peterson 2009:532).

The disciples received the Spirit, as in 8:15–17 and as in Samaria. The reality of their charismatic experience is evidenced in their ecstatic manifestation of speaking in tongues (impf. indic. act. translated as ingressive – ἐλάλουν τε γλώσσαις καὶ ἐπροφήτευσον) (Parsons & Culy 2003:361). As a rule, the verb in imperfect tense conveys past activity that is more than a single action, in other words, referring to the ongoing aspect of the activity. They also prophesied (kept on prophesying).

The newly constituted group of Ephesian Christians presumable remained attached to the synagogue until the Jews forced Paul to leave with the disciples before continuing his mission for 2 more years (vv. 8–9).

## Conclusion

Acts' author uses 'baptising' (1:5; 11:16), 'receiving' (2:38; 10:47; 10:47), 'filling' (2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9; 13:52), 'poured out' (2:17f.; 10:45) or 'came upon' (8:16; 10:44; 11:15) to describe the act of receiving the Spirit baptism. 'Baptism' refers to the initial work of the Spirit in a believer's life that begins the relationship. Like water baptism, it is not repeated (Ac 11:15–16; Rm 6:3; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 2:12). However, Spirit-baptised believers should continue to permit the Spirit to work in their lives, called the Spirit's filling (see Ac 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9, 52; Gl 5:16; Eph 4:30; 5:18). Western logic argues that something full cannot be filled, but in terms of the Spirit, a further filling is possible, to enable a particular mission (Ac 4:31) (Peterson 2009:134).

Acts 1:6–8 relate witness, Pentecost and prayer. Jesus promised that the Spirit would change the disciples into witnesses. The condition for receiving the endowment of the Spirit with power is the disciples' united prayers that eventually introduced Pentecost. According to Luke 24:49, Jesus would send 'what was promised by the Father' upon the disciples if they stayed in Jerusalem and awaited the realisation of the power from on high.

The fulfilment of Acts 1 in the following chapter illustrates the effects of the Spirit's empowerment when Peter, along with the other apostles, witnessed to Jesus as Saviour and resurrected Lord: three thousand were baptised and joined the community of believers (2:41). On the day of Pentecost, the promise of 1:6–8 is fulfilled when wind, divided tongues and their speaking in tongues constituted the believers' divine encounter. The effectiveness of Peter's proclamation in explaining what happened demonstrates the purpose of the tongues, to be witnesses to Jesus.

The next phase or stage of early missiological success is when a group of Samaritans responded to Phillip's message and received evidence of Spirit baptism that convinced Simon, a magician, to bargain for the power to impart the gift to others. In Acts 8, Simon saw the new believers receiving the Spirit when the apostles laid their hands on them. The text does not describe what sign he saw that accompanied Spirit baptism, but it can be inferred that it refers to speaking in tongues. In Acts 10, the believers reached a new boundary, a Gentile audience. Cornelius, described as devout and God-fearing, sent for Peter, who needed a divine vision to overcome his reluctance to associate with Gentiles. When he started speaking, the Spirit fell on the audience; they began speaking in tongues and glorified God. The Spirit convinced them of the truth of Peter's witness, and they were only baptised after their experience of Spirit baptism. In Acts 19, the order is overturned. Meeting with some disciples of John in Ephesus, Paul asked whether they had received the Spirit when or after they believed. They responded that they had not even heard about the Spirit. Paul rebaptised them in the name of Jesus, laid hands on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

It becomes clear from the differences among the narratives that a post-conversion experience of the Spirit was normative in Acts, as attested to in 2:4; 8:12–17; 9:17 and 19:5–6, and it is also theologically implicit in conversion, attested to in 2:38–39 and 11:16–17. Some dimensions of the Spirit's work available in conversion and Spirit baptism were subsequently more fully experienced at later stages. It is also clear that the order in which the Spirit reveals divine power to believers does not follow a set pattern.

Lastly, Keener's remark is significant: while the Spirit's involvement in conversion was unnegotiable for Luke, he also saw the need for Spirit baptism as a separate experience that empowered disciples for their mission. What is important is not when believers experience Spirit baptism, whether before, sometime after or very soon after baptism. There is no theological grid for Spirit reception. What Acts' narratives demonstrate is that conversion that initiates believers into the new life requires the additional encounter of enablement for their mission.

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