

Who Is the
HOLY SPIRIT?

Praise for *Who is the Holy Spirit?*

"Amos Yong has written a wonderful meditation on the Holy Spirit that explores who God's Spirit is, as well as how the Spirit's work penetrates every element of human existence. Fully conversant with contemporary approaches to biblical interpretation, Yong facilitates an illuminating conversation between Luke's Gospel and Acts to fashion a sacred space in which the reader can grow in understanding the Holy Spirit's practical importance in forming Christ's disciples for today's world. This book should be used in the local church or college classroom to initiate Christians into a richer, more profound appreciation of the empowering presence of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity."

—DR. ROBERT W. WALL, the Paul T. Walls Professor of Scripture
and Wesleyan Studies, Seattle Pacific University

"Amos Yong's Who Is the Holy Spirit? offers a fresh perspective on Luke-Acts. Although some before him have read together Jesus' story in Luke with the missions story of Acts, Yong provides new insights. By asking new questions traditionally neglected in approaches to Luke-Acts, he provides us new perspectives. As a biblical scholar, I have found these insights challenging and useful."

—CRAIG S. KEENER, Professor of New Testament,
Palmer Theological Seminary

"I strongly recommend this book on the Holy Spirit to individuals and communities seeking to be transformed so that they can do the Spirit's work when and where the Spirit may bring them about. Drawing on Acts and Luke to illuminate our own lives, it provides a rich resource for understanding how we might discern and participate in the Holy Spirit's work in our world today."

—LOIS MALCOLM, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology,
Luther Seminary and Review Editor for the *Journal of the
Society of Christian Ethics*

"How relevant is the Holy Spirit in today's world? Very, as Amos Yong makes clear in Who Is the Holy Spirit? In a comprehensive approach that is both eminently readable and well-researched, Dr. Yong traces the work of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts through its myriad contemporary implications. A must-read for Christians!"

—JANICE MCGRANE, SSJ, author of *Saints to Lean On:
Spiritual Companions for Illness & Disability*

a PARACLETE GUIDE

Who Is the
HOLY SPIRIT?

A WALK WITH THE APOSTLES

Amos Yong



PARACLETE PRESS
BREWSTER, MASSACHUSETTS

Who Is the Holy Spirit? A Walk with the Apostles

Copyright © 2011 by Amos Yong

ISBN 978-1-55725-635-5

Scripture references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Yong, Amos.

Who is the Holy Spirit? : a walk with the Apostles / Amos Yong.

p. cm.—(A Paraclete guide)

Includes bibliographical references (p. 217) and index.

ISBN 978-1-55725-635-5

1. Holy Spirit—Biblical teaching. 2. Bible. N.T. Acts—Commentaries. 3. Bible. N.T. Luke—Criticism, interpretation, etc. I. Title.

BS2589.6.H62Y66 2011

231'.3—dc22

2011010838

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in an electronic retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Published by Paraclete Press

Brewster, Massachusetts

www.paracletepress.com

Printed in the United States of America

To Alyssa

With all my love.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

How Wide Is the World and Work of the Holy Spirit?	ix
----------------------------------------------------	----

PART ONE *The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*

1 The Acts of the Holy Spirit and the Kingdom of God	3
2 Promising to Restore the Kingdom of Israel, and the Spirit Came!	7
3 Pentecost—the Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh!	12

PART TWO *The Power of the Spirit in Jerusalem*

4 The Spirit's New Economy of Salvation	19
5 Repentance as/and the Gift of the Holy Spirit	24
6 Fellowship in the Spirit	29
7 The Mission of Jesus Christ, the Anointed One	33
8 The Holy Spirit and the Politics of Healing	37
9 Charismatic Healing as a Sign of the Kingdom	43

PART THREE *The Economics of the Spirit in Judea*

10 Economics of the Spirit	53
11 No "Class" Hierarchies in the Spirit!	57
12 Spirit and Persecution: The Politics of Restoration	61
13 The Spirit and Passion of Christ: Politics of Peace	65
14 Multiculturalism, Globalization, and the Spirit	69
15 Poverty and Possessions: Spirit-Filled Life and the Global Economy	74

PART FOUR *Leaving Judea? A Theological Excursus*

16 A Hellenistic Account of Israel's Story: The Work of the Spirit and the "Ends of the Earth"	81
17 Judgment on Jerusalem: The Spirit and the Redemption of Israel	85

<i>PART FIVE The Spirit Moves into Samaria and on the Highways of Ancient Palestine</i>	
18	Samaria: The Spirit Meets the "Religious Other" 91
19	The Spirit Meets the Ethiopian Eunuch: Redeeming Disability 95
20	The Spirit and Politics of (Paul's) Conversion 100
21	Conversion and the Calling of the Spirit 104
22	Resurrection and the Power of the Spirit 108
<i>PART SIX The Gentiles and the Holy Spirit</i>	
23	"God Shows No Partiality"! Jews, Gentiles, and the Spirit 115
24	Kingdom Work: Restoring Israel—Calling the Nations! 119
25	"Cast Out the Evil One"! Sorcery and the Spirit/s 122
26	Satan, the Demonic, and Empire 127
27	The Spirit's Universal Work 131
28	Parables of the Spirit's Work in the World 135
<i>PART SEVEN The Holy Spirit Turns the World Upside Down</i>	
29	Your Daughters Shall Prophesy! 141
30	Jesus the Profeminist! The Anointing of Women 146
31	Profit, Power, Politics, Praise 149
32	Praying for the Kingdom—Amid Empire 153
33	The Spirit Turns the World Upside Down 157
34	The Spirit and the New World Dis/order 161
35	The Spirit and the Encounter of Money and Religion 165
<i>PART EIGHT Toward the Ends of the Earth</i>	
36	The Spirit as Witness to the Resurrection 173
37	Nature and the Cosmic Spirit 177
38	The Spirit and the Eucharist 181
39	Barbarians, Believers, and the Spirit of Hospitality 185
EPILOGUE	189
LEADERS' STUDY GUIDE AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	193
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	209
NOTES	213
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	217
INDEX	221

INTRODUCTION

How Wide Is the World and Work of the Holy Spirit?

I GREW UP in a Pentecostal-evangelical environment. My life growing up was marked by a keen awareness of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. I had a series of ecstatic experiences of the Holy Spirit at summer church camps during my teenage years, which left a deep impression on my religious life. The gifts of the Holy Spirit that were frequently manifested in our churches—speaking in tongues, words of prophecy, healings—have shaped my understanding. I am grateful to God for blessing me with the Pentecostalism of my youth.

However, I've also come to see that, as valuable as these experiences have been, they are only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. And by this, I don't mean only that the Spirit has touched lives all over the world like he has touched my own. I've also come to recognize that my own view of the Spirit's person and work is too individualistic, too spiritualistic, and too ecclesiocentric. In my pietistic upbringing, for example, the work of the Spirit had to do with me: my salvation, my sanctification, my experience of the Spirit's power touching the lives of others in my church. I am not denying that these are all important ways in which God meets human lives. However, I concluded from this that the be-all and end-all of the Spirit's work was to transform individuals.

Related to this was the sense that the work of the Holy Spirit was designed to purify me from this world and to prepare me spiritually for the life to come. Life in this world was important only as a testing and training ground, and the Spirit was the divine helper sent to prepare us for eternal life. Here, I was a pilgrim alongside other pilgrims, and together we were the body and church of Jesus Christ, cleansed and empowered by his Holy Spirit to bear witness to the world about the coming rule of God. So I thought the work of the Spirit was pretty much restricted to the Christian life and the life of the church.

Of course, the Spirit was also at work "out there" in the world, but only to convict unbelievers of their sin and to turn them to Christ. Here again, in the faith of my childhood the Spirit worked only at the level of the individual, focused primarily if not only on the spiritual dimension of individual lives, in order to transform and save them in light of the coming judgment of God and the world. I don't deny today that the Spirit remains active in the world in all of these ways, but I now believe there is so much more the Spirit is doing in the world beyond what I'd been trained to recognize. I now believe that the Spirit is at work not just at the level of the individual but also at the level of society and its various political and economic structures; not just at the otherworldly, spiritual level but also at the this-worldly level of the material and concrete domains of our lives; not just in and through the church but also in and through wider institutional, cultural, and even religious realities. In other words, I now think that the world of the Holy Spirit is much wider than I'd guessed, and that the work of the Spirit is to redeem and transform our world as a whole along with all of its interconnected parts, systems, and structures.

This book attempts to sketch such a vision of the person and work of the Holy Spirit by a careful rereading of the New Testament—particularly Luke-Acts. The author of this two-part work, known in the Christian tradition as Luke the physician, is not only the most prolific contributor to the New Testament but also the one who mentions the Holy Spirit more than any other. In fact, both the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles are often deemed as narratives about the works of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8 says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The “you” refers to the disciples, who will testify of Jesus to the ends of the earth. Pause just a moment. Take note with me that there is a geographical progression going on here. Starting from Jerusalem (Acts 1:12–6:7), expanding outward from there through Judea and Samaria (6:8–9:31), and culminating in Rome (9:32–28:31)—the “ends of the earth” from the Jewish perspective centered in Jerusalem—this is precisely the outline of the book of Acts. So Acts tells us that the entire apostolic witness to the ends of the earth is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

In the chapters to follow we will see that the work of the Holy Spirit concerns both that of individual lives and the wider world, both the spiritual and the more mundane aspects of our existence, both the church and the wider public square. It will take us the rest of the book to fully understand this. Preliminarily, note that the events recorded in Luke-Acts occur within the realm of the Roman Empire. Hence there is an inevitable political dimension to the text; sometimes this is evident, other times it is “behind the text” or between the lines. I propose that if we read Luke-Acts as set within the matrix and under the shadow of imperial Rome, we will

see how the Holy Spirit's working in the lives of the earliest followers of Jesus is connected to the Spirit's activity in the politics of this world. This may also help us link the work of Spirit in our personal lives to that in national and international politics today.

There are also extensive passages throughout Luke-Acts that address the social and economic dimension of human lives. These themes are intertwined with the messianic mission of Jesus to restore the kingdom to Israel. Yet such restoration involved neither a revolutionary form of nationalism hostile to the Gentiles (as many first-century Jewish zealots had hoped for) nor a merely spiritual realization of "Israel" in the church (as previous supersessionist theologies have posited). Instead, the restoration of Israel involved a renewal and fulfillment of the ancient promise to Abraham—that through his descendents, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Acts 3:25; cf. Gen. 12:3)—that simultaneously invited the participation of all the peoples of the earth in the messianic kingdom of peace, justice, and righteousness. I believe that the two books of Luke and Acts will also illuminate what the Spirit is doing in our social arrangements and in our economies, even the global economy today.

Finally, as already noted, the apostolic horizons are global: "to the ends of the earth." This concern about the whole world includes the diversity of languages, the broad spectrum of people groups (Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, slave and free), and all cultures and ethnicities. In that sense, I believe that this study can help us understand what the Spirit might be doing today in a world of multiculturalism, class stratification, diversity, and pluralism.

Above all, if we can see how the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus and his followers to announce in their words and enact in their

deeds the arrival of the coming kingdom of God, this might help us to discern and participate in the work of the Holy Spirit in the world today. The following quest reflects my desire to discern the Spirit's work in our world, not only so that we can be better witnesses to those "outside," but also that we may be transformed as individual followers of Jesus and as members of a community of believers seeking to do the works of Christ whenever and wherever the Spirit may bring them about.¹

Our study will proceed as follows. We will begin with the book of Acts and pretty much follow the narrative sequentially as laid out by Luke. This will help us to enter into the world of the earliest followers of Jesus the Messiah, to follow their footsteps as they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. By so doing, we will see the Holy Spirit at work in individual lives, empowering them to proclaim and live out the messiahship and lordship of Jesus Christ in the world. But because the earliest believers lived out of their memory of Jesus, in almost every other chapter, we will glance "back," historically speaking, from Acts to the Gospel of Luke itself, in order to glimpse just how the followers of Jesus might have been inspired by his Spirit-filled life, ministry, and teachings as they negotiated their own challenges of being in but not of the world. Proceeding in this way does what I had been raised to do: reread our present life in light of the lives of the apostles so as to allow their experiences to illuminate our own.

As I will be staying pretty close to the text of Acts and Luke, given our approach, I strongly recommend keeping a copy of the New Testament closely at hand. We will observe how the central role played by the kingdom of God in the Spirit-empowered lives of Jesus and his followers enriches our quest to discern the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives today. But ours is an interpretive

approach that has by and large been absent in most devotional, homiletic, and commentary interactions with the Lukan writings. My intention will be to spend most of our time in each chapter exploring how the work of the Spirit to bring about the kingdom has wider implications for understanding the message and demands of the gospel.

The eight parts of this book follow the path of the apostles as recorded in the book of Acts as intimated in 1:8—"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Breaking up the many chapters of the book into these more manageable parts will help us walk with the apostles and learn with them as their own horizons were continuously expanded in following the work of the Holy Spirit from Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth. This will in turn give rise to questions about how to see the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, in our churches, and in our world today. My goal in these studies, however, is to be less prescriptive about how to respond to these contemporary questions than to open up some biblical and theological "space" for these questions to emerge, and for present-day followers of Jesus to discuss and explore the issues. Hence the discussion questions at the end of the book are correlated with each chapter and meant to stimulate church, college, or study group conversation about the work of the Spirit in the world. I am convinced that if we pay careful attention to how the Holy Spirit worked through Jesus and his followers to transform their world, so also will we be in a better place to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit as he speaks to and leads us today in that same task.

PART ONE



The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

1

The Acts of the Holy Spirit and the Kingdom of God

Acts 1; Luke 22:24-30

IN THE FIRST BOOK, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning," is what Acts 1:1 says. Luke is referring of course to the Gospel of Luke as that "first book." It too was dedicated to Theophilus. The original readers of these volumes, Theophilus and those in his community, were either citizens or, more probably, residents of the Roman Empire. It's amid this reality that we are being introduced to the teachings about and the inauguration of the kingdom of God.

Jesus taught his disciples about the kingdom during the forty days between his resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:3). Jesus' teachings about the kingdom during this period were at least in part about his own life and ministry, as foretold by the Scriptures (Lk. 24:44-46). But his life was intimately linked to the kingdom, in terms of both what he proclaimed and what he did. In other words, in the life and teachings of Jesus, the kingdom of God comes up against and even confronts the kingdoms of this world, the latter being most prominently represented by King Herod of Judea (1:5) and Emperors Augustus (2:1) and Tiberius (3:1) of the Roman Empire.

In Jesus' last exchange with the disciples before his ascension, their urgent question to him was, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). This question reflects

4 Who Is the Holy Spirit?

the assumption that (minimally) the Messiah would overthrow the Roman rule immediately, enable Israel to repossess the land promised to their ancestors, and usher in Yahweh's reign over Zion. But more than this, the question also reflected the disciples' own self-understanding about the specific role they would play in the new kingdom of Israel. After all, Jesus had appointed the Twelve as leaders of the new Israel and promised that they would "eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and . . . will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk. 22:30).

But part of the problem was that one of the Twelve (Judas) had defected and was no longer among them. Understanding their situation in light of scriptural resources (Acts 1:16–20; cf. Ps. 69:25; 109:8), the remaining eleven were led to cast lots for two nominated brothers, who met strict criteria, in order to prepare for their reign in the coming kingdom. Yet the "elected" individual, Matthias, never gets mentioned again in the Acts of the Apostles. This entire episode reveals that the disciples did not anticipate the renewal of Israel would take a very different shape.

In response to their question about when the kingdom would appear, Jesus said: "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:7–8). In one sense, Jesus' answer to their question is no: the times and periods of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel remain unknown, resting only in the authority of the Father. Yet during this interim period the apostles will be given the power of the Holy Spirit in order to bear witness to the life and ministry of the one who proclaimed and did the works of the kingdom. So, even if the direct response to the disciples'

question is negative, the indirect response is more complicated: while we may not know when the full restoration of Israel will happen, we will nevertheless be empowered to proclaim the teachings and do the deeds of the Messiah himself. In this case, the actual answer to the disciples' question depends on the extent to which they are open to receiving the kingdom and living it out through the Spirit's power.

The gift of the Holy Spirit empowers the disciples' witnesses to the ends of the earth. This is no generic witness, but one that is specific to geographic regions like Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the heart of the empire, Rome itself. In other words, not only does the Spirit empower the disciples' witness to the kingdom teachings and realities of Jesus, but the Spirit does so in order to establish the kingdom amid the present imperial rule of Caesar and his regional governments. So when the disciples then go forth to proclaim the kingdom, they do so with the full reality of the Roman Empire pressing down on them.

No doubt there were various views among the earliest followers of Jesus regarding the relationship between the kingdom of God and the empire of Rome. Some discounted any link, saying that the divine kingdom has to do with the next world and hence has no relation to the Roman Empire. Others believed that the empire was more friendly than not to Christian interests, and perhaps Luke wrote in part to convince Roman leaders that Christians were not troublemakers (rather, Jews were), or even that Christians were actually model citizens who deserved all of the political benefits given to religious practitioners throughout the empire. And there was probably also a third group that believed Jesus' teachings and deeds challenged the social, economic, and political structures of imperial Rome.

6 Who Is the Holy Spirit?

The Acts of the Apostles are also the acts of the Holy Spirit in the church, acts that are subversive of the empires of this world. The story of the early church should be understood as the establishment and emergence of a community that proclaimed and embodied the messianic life and teachings of Jesus against the cultic, political, and economic structures of the Roman Empire in the first century. How then should contemporary readers of Luke-Acts live amid the powers of this world, wherever they might be—whether that of China in the Far East, of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, of the European Union, of America, or even of the empire of global market consumerism? While it will take us the rest of this book to answer these questions concretely, let me say for the moment that the key to our response lies precisely in Jesus' response to the disciples' question about when the kingdom would be restored to Israel: in the gift of the Holy Spirit. The empowering witness of the Spirit has been and will continue to be central to how Christians live faithfully in a world of many oftentimes conflicting powers. Whether the demands on our lives are imposed by governments, social systems, or the global economy, it is the Holy Spirit who enables the proper and appropriate response that is sensitive to the variables of each situation. The Spirit who effectively empowered the acts of the apostles during the *Pax Romana* is the same Spirit who is available to followers of the Messiah today.

2

Promising to Restore the Kingdom of Israel, and the Spirit Came!

Luke 1:46-55, 67-79; 2:22-38

BUT WHAT EXACTLY WERE THE DISCIPLES EXPECTING with regard to Jesus and the kingdom of God? We've already seen that the Jewish hopes regarding the kingdom were connected to the Messiah, who would free them from foreign rule. More precisely, the coming of the kingdom would restore the land of Israel according to the covenants made with Abraham, Moses, and David. Now let's focus our attention on what the disciples as well as Luke's readers had been led to expect regarding what the Messiah would accomplish. To do so, we should look carefully at a number of passages from the infancy narrative of Luke's Gospel.

We can begin with Mary's song of praise, well known as the "Magnificat" (Lk. 1:46-55). This lowly peasant girl was told by the angel Gabriel that the child she would conceive would receive "the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (1:32-33). Clearly, then, this miracle involves God's remembering "the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants" (1:55). But what will happen as a result of the coming of the Messiah by the Holy Spirit? Mary anticipates that the powerful will be brought down and the lowly exalted, that the rich will be impoverished while the poor will be uplifted (1:52-53).

8 Who Is the Holy Spirit?

Zechariah, a faithful priest and husband of Elizabeth, Mary's relative, had already been told that his son, John (the Baptist), would "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (1:17). On the day of John's circumcision (dedication), Zechariah confirms Mary's song through a prophecy from the Holy Spirit (1:67):

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and
redeemed them.
He has raised up a mighty savior for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we would be saved from our enemies and from the
hand of all who hate us.
(1:68–71)

Zechariah also understood that the promised salvation of Israel would involve the peaceful forgiveness of their sins (1:78–79)—which necessarily had to precede the restoration of Israel—so he did not necessarily think that the messianic kingdom would involve a violent revolution. Nevertheless, God's redemption of Israel would shine a light on those who lived in the shadow of darkness and enable them once again to serve him in holiness and righteousness.

Last, when Jesus was presented in the temple, Simeon was said to be "looking forward to the consolation of Israel" (2:25) and Anna to be anticipating "the redemption of Jerusalem" (2:38). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Simeon comes to see that the consolation and restoration of Israel is necessarily intertwined with the fate of the rest of the world:

My eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel. (2:30–32)

Undoubtedly the prosperity of Israel depends on her restoration and living in peace with her Gentile neighbors.

Many contemporary readers have come to understand these references to the redemption of Israel in spiritual terms. After all, Jesus neither overthrew the Roman rule over Palestine nor established Yahweh's political reign over Israel. In fact, not only was the temple itself razed to the ground a generation later (in 70 CE), but there are other passages (to be discussed later) in Luke-Acts that seem to transfer the promises of the covenant from the Jews to the Gentiles.

But Jesus' birth is presented by Luke in terms that clearly announce his kingdom as being at least superimposed on if not replacing Caesar's. By the first century, Caesar's birthday was celebrated as symbolizing the "good news" that the emperor brought to his subjects throughout the empire, and Caesar was exalted as divine "Son of God," "lord," "redeemer," and "savior" through the cult of the emperor. Jesus is announced in precisely these terms as the "Son of the Most High" (Lk. 1:32) who would restore the Davidic kingdom. So if in those days even his parents were under the rule of king Herod of Judea and governor Quirinius of Syria, and even if they were subject to Augustus Caesar's decree of taxation, Jesus' birth brought forth the angelic proclamation regarding the arrival of "a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (2:11). Readers of the Gospel could hardly have missed Luke's understanding that Jesus' arrival challenged Caesar's assumed divinity, lordship, and salvific stature.

This background helps us to understand why the disciples, after following Jesus for three years and listening to him teach about the kingdom for forty days (Acts 1:3), still wondered if the times of restoration had finally arrived. If Jesus was the Messiah, then, according to the Old Testament—alluded to throughout Mary's Magnificat and Zechariah's prophecy—God was going to fulfill the covenant promises. Justice would be served on the enemies of Israel, on those powerful, proud, and rich Roman rulers and their aristocratic patrons (political, religious, and cultural leaders) who had conspired to keep the peasant farmworkers and landowners in poverty (through high taxation, sometimes of up to 50 percent of total crop) and thereby oppressed the lower classes. From the perspective of Mary, Joseph (a carpenter), and others at the bottom rung of Israelite society, the good news—the *euangelion*—of the Messiah's arrival brought with it tangible material expectations. If in fact Israel was to be saved from her enemies, God would have to raise up the Messiah to bring about a massive revolution.

Meanwhile, think for a moment about how the ruling classes of the first century might have reacted to news coming out of Palestine that the king long anticipated by the Jews had been born. What if they had heard that the kingdom of Jesus would be established over and against that of Caesar and his patrons and that part of the upheaval that would occur involved the leveling of the rich and powerful and the exaltation of the socially marginalized? Even if we grant for the moment that the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus was purely spiritual, the messianic expectations of the common people combined with the fears of the upper classes regarding the instability of their own social position would have been enough to cause a stir. Is it any wonder, then, that the Jewish religious leaders—groups like the chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, and

Sadducees that, unlike most modern political parties, were both religious and political—were concerned enough about how Jesus might upset their own place in the sociopolitical hierarchy that they led the charge eventually to execute him?

What is clear is that the promise to restore the kingdom was connected to the promise of the Holy Spirit. We shall see later that, just as the Holy Spirit worked in the life of Jesus to bring about the kingdom, so also the Spirit empowered his followers to herald the kingdom. What does this then say about us today who are recipients of the same Holy Spirit? Perhaps there is a middle ground between thinking either that the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus is a spiritual reality located in the coming future or that we are called to be revolutionaries who would overthrow the ruling empires of our world today. Maybe this middle ground involves our being open to receiving the Spirit's empowerment so that we also might be agents who hasten the kingdom, which is in some respects already present, even if it is in other respects still to come. Maybe it might involve our engaging with and dismantling, by the power of the Spirit, the unjust structures that keep the poor impoverished, as sung about by Mary. More unimaginably, maybe the Spirit will enable the reconciliation of enemies so that salvation would come upon traditional enemies, as Zechariah prophesied, but through just peacemaking rather than by the overthrow or annihilation of the historical adversaries. Why would it be impossible to imagine today, for example, peace between Jews and Palestinians, or between Israelis and Arabs? Is it not possible that the coming of the Spirit was intended to complete the work of restoring Israel but to do so precisely by including and reconciling Jews and Gentiles rather than by perpetuating their divisions? If so, then the promise to restore the kingdom is still in the making, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

3 Pentecost—the Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh!

Acts 2:1–21

SO THE DISCIPLES WENT OFF TO JERUSALEM, as instructed by Jesus, to await the arrival of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit did arrive, like a bang, on the Day of Pentecost, which was the traditional Feast of Weeks that occurred fifty days after the Feast of Passover (Lev. 23:15–21; Deut. 16:9–12) and that celebrated the wheat harvest as symbolic of the renewal of the Mosaic covenant. Little did they realize, however, the extent to which this Pentecost experience would contribute to the renewal of Israel.

The gift of the Spirit on this day marks the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham and repeated by Simeon: that the seed of Abraham would be the means through which the Gentiles would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; cf. Lk. 2:32). The covenant of God with Abraham, Moses, and David, in other words, was not only for the sake of Israel but also for the world. In the Pentecost event linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and national barriers between Israel and the Gentiles are overcome, making clear the universal scope of God's promises. To be sure, the goal of the Christian mission, as empowered by the Holy Spirit, was to take the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Yet since the list of nations and peoples in this passage is representative of previous Jewish lists of nations—for example Genesis 10 and 1 Chronicles 1—the gift of the Holy

Spirit's outpouring on all those present on this day anticipates the outpouring on "all flesh" (Acts 2:17) that is to come.

The majority of those in Jerusalem were God-fearing and "devout Jews from every nation under heaven" (2:5). They certainly included Jews and Gentile proselytes to Judaism, but perhaps also partial converts who were uncircumcised or not fully Torah-observant. It seems likely that the original Christian community—the three thousand who were baptized in response to this Pentecost event (Acts 2:41)—inaugurated a new movement that included individuals with varying commitments to Jewish faith from around the Mediterranean world.

The mention of Cretans (2:11) would also have broken stereotypes about who was "in" or "out" of the kingdom, especially given the widespread belief, promulgated partly by Cretans themselves, that Cretans were "always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons" (Titus 1:12). Clearly, the people swept up into this new Jesus movement included those who would have been excluded if the reigning prejudices of the day had been in effect. But imagine how different the history of the last two thousand years might have been if those from Arabia had been fully incorporated into the new people of God. Perhaps the split between the children of Sarah and Hagar, between the descendents of Jacob and Ishmael, might have been healed by the Spirit of reconciliation. Maybe contemporary hostilities in the Middle East would have been avoided if Jews, proselytes, or Gentiles from Arabia had nurtured the new relations brought about on the Day of Pentecost.

Is it possible that the Day of Pentecost restored the covenant promises to Israel in part by constituting a new people of God, one composed of Jews but yet not exclusive of proselytes and Gentiles,

one that included a diversity of languages, and one that embodied a plurality of cultures and people groups? First-century Palestinian life, in many ways like our global village today, was marked by suspicions about those who were different, who spoke other languages, and who represented strange ways of life. It was the work of the Spirit, however, to overcome these barriers, to bring those who were strangers together, and to reconcile those who might have otherwise lived apart from those unlike themselves.

Pentecost thus inaugurates a restored Israel and God's kingdom by establishing new social structures and relations. Note that the gift of the Spirit was not withheld from any of the 120 men and women who had gathered in the upper room (Acts 1:14–15): the divided tongues of fire rested on each one and enabled each to either speak or be heard in foreign languages (2:3–4). In order to explain this phenomenon, Peter cites the prophet Joel:

your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy. (2:17–18; cf. Joel 2:28–29)

Peter clearly understood that, whereas the former Jewish era was patriarchal in character, the restoration of Israel would feature the equality of male and female: both would prophesy under the power of the Spirit. Whereas the former covenant featured the leadership of elders, the restored kingdom would involve the empowering of men and women of all ages. Whatever structures had previously sanctioned the social system of slavery, the outpouring of the Spirit had been and would be indiscriminately upon both free and slave,

in effect making them equal. In all of this, the work of the Spirit was heralded in strange tongues, not the conventional languages of the status quo.

In effect, the restoration of the kingdom through the power of the Spirit actually overturned the status quo. As Mary and Zechariah had already foretold, those at the bottom of the social ladder—women, youth, and slaves—would be recipients of the Spirit and vehicles of the Spirit's empowerment. People previously divided by language, ethnicity, culture, nationality, gender, and class would be reconciled in this new version of the kingdom. Potentially, "all flesh" would be included within this kingdom of the last days (Acts 2:17).

Do these characteristics continue to mark the church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit? Is the church still a universal presence that reconciles Jewish and Gentile communities divided for various reasons? Does the church still speak in the tongues of the Spirit that conjointly proclaim the renewal of Israel (thus preserving the distinctiveness of God's covenant with the Jews) and the introduction of the kingdom (thus opening up the promises of God to the world), or do we remain captive to the divisive languages, structures, and conventions of the empires of this world? Our prayer should be, "Come Holy Spirit!" so that the proclaimed outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh might indeed still find its fulfillment in our time.

PART TWO



The Power of the Spirit in Jerusalem

4

The Spirit's New Economy of Salvation

Acts 2:22-40

PETER'S QUOTATION FROM JOEL ends with the declaration that, on the glorious Day of the Lord when Yahweh would restore Israel, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). In that sense, the restoration of Israel involves the salvation both of the Jews and of all who call on the name of Yahweh. But there is more since, for Peter and Luke, who is retelling the history of Peter's sermon, salvation is bound up in "Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you" (2:22). The heart of the Good News, then, was to "let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified" (2:36).

We have already seen that the Jews were awaiting the Messiah, who would restore the house of Israel according to the promises made to Abraham, Moses, and David. Here in his first sermon, the Spirit-empowered Peter makes explicit Jesus' connections with the Davidic covenant. Not only does Peter mention David four times by name, but he also quotes or alludes to various royal psalms, songs that celebrate the restoration of the Davidic reign in the messianic age. One of these citations also confirms that Israel will be vindicated before her enemies (2:35; cf. Lk. 1:71; Ps. 110:1). The hope of the resurrection in ancient Israel was connected to the

renewal of the Davidic covenant and the restoration of the nation (cf. Ezek. 37:1–14).

Luke is thereby accentuating Jesus' credentials in the line of David. But more than that, since David remained in the grave, Jesus is the one who fulfills the covenant promises about resurrection life. For the Jews who believed in a general raising of the dead at the end of the age connected with the restoration of Israel, the resurrection of Jesus would have meant both that David's kingship now belongs to Jesus and that the redemption of Israel and the last days, the Day of the Lord, had indeed arrived in the person of the man from Nazareth.

Further, the resurrection of Jesus precipitates his exaltation to the right hand of God from where, "having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear" (Acts 2:33). So while the Father has promised the Spirit (Lk. 24:49), it is the resurrected Messiah who keeps the promise. Although salvation is based on the Spirit's work in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Lord Jesus (rather than Lord Caesar), it is realized and actualized through the ascended Messiah, who pours out that same Spirit on all flesh. If in the Gospel of Luke the Holy Spirit acts in the life of Jesus, in Acts, Jesus is present and active in the restored people of God in the power of the Spirit.

It is this exalted Messiah who has been crucified by a disbelieving and corrupt generation (2:40). Peter straightforwardly accuses his listeners, "You crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law" (2:23; cf. 2:36). His audience is convicted by the fact that they have, however inadvertently, chosen to abide by the politics of Caesar and his lordship rather than that of the anointed Messiah. Wishing to avoid the judgment that befalls those who