

‘YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER TO CROSS THE BOUNDARIES’ (ACTS 1:8):
THE HOLY SPIRIT AS THE BOUNDARY CROSSER AND THE BOUNDARY MARKER¹
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Introduction

Acts 1:8, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”, speaks both of our identity as witnesses of Christ and of our vocation as those who bear witness to Christ in the world. It is the Holy Spirit who marks our identity and empowers us to fulfil our vocation. Hence, this paper seeks to explore in what sense the Holy Spirit is the empowering agent to the crossing of the boundaries (missions) and becomes the key boundary marker (identity) in the book of Acts. Particularly following “a roadmap”² offered in Acts 1:8, it aims to show how the narrative of Acts, especially in its first half (Acts 1—15), depicts the crossing of geographical and ethnic boundaries with the empowerment of the Spirit.

The prominence of the Holy Spirit in Acts and its relation to the spread of early Christianity is axiomatic. However, the specific nature of the relationship between mission and the Holy Spirit has been much debated. Robert P. Menzies, supporting “classical Pentecostal perspectives on Spirit-Baptism”, argues that the Holy Spirit is an empowering gift for witness, and thus it is exclusively the Spirit of prophesy in Luke-Acts.³ James Dunn, while admitting the dominance of the Spirit of prophecy in Luke-Acts, maintains a “soteriological” role of the Holy Spirit.⁴ For Max Turner, the eschatological gift of the Spirit in Luke-Acts is the spirit of the restoration of Israel.⁵ Pushing Turner’s argument forward, Matthias Wenk shows how the Spirit in Luke-Acts redefines and constitutes the people of God.⁶ In so doing, he shifts the discussion on Lukan pneumatology from either a missional or soteriological gift toward a holistic one which embraces the transforming work of the Spirit within the early Christian communities.⁷

¹ This paper is a slight revision of a paper first delivered at the Love, Boundaries, and Sacred Texts Colloquium on 2 – 3 May, 2019 at the University of Manchester.

² David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (WUNT 2.130; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 294.

³ Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (JPTSup 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 45, 170. (115)

⁴ James D.G. Dunn, “‘The Lord, the Giver of Life’: The Gift of the Spirit as Both Life-giving and Empowering,” in *The Spirit and Christ in the New Testament & Christian Theology: Essays in Honor of Max Turner* (eds. I. Howard Marshall, Volker Rabens and Cornelis Bennema; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 15–17.

⁵ Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 341–47.

⁶ Matthias Wenk, *Community-Forming Power: The Socio-Ethical Role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts* (JPTSup 19; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 277.

⁷ Wenk, *Community-Forming*, 315.

More recently, Aaron Kuecker, taking up Wenk's remark on "the Spirit as the community's identity marker",⁸ employs the social identity theory and explores "the role of the Holy Spirit and the place of ethnic identity" in Luke-Acts.⁹ It is within this scholarly discussion that this paper examines Acts 1:8 which anticipates the coming of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem (Acts 2), in Samaria (Acts 8), and in Cornelius' household of Caesarea (Acts 10). After a brief discussion of Acts 1:8, it will follow "Luke's narrative geography"¹⁰ to explore the ways in which the Spirit empowers the disciples to cross cultural-linguistic, socio-economic, and in particular ethnic boundaries. In so doing, the Spirit also reshapes the identity of the early Christians on the way.

An Examination of Acts 1:8

Acts 1:8 is "a programmatic statement"¹¹ which sets a central agenda for the whole narrative of Acts as Luke 4:18–19 does for Luke's Gospel. It is loaded with some of the key themes in Acts: 'power', 'the Holy Spirit', 'witness', 'Jerusalem', and 'the ends of the earth'. Moreover, this is the final word of the risen Lord before his ascension (Acts 1:9) and the recapitulation of the ending of Luke's Gospel (Luke 24:47–49). It also comes as an answer to the question about the timing of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). While the coming of an empowering gift of the Holy Spirit is promised and is soon to be realised (Acts 2:1–4), the role of the Holy Spirit and the list of the geographical markers in Acts 1:8 are of our interest here. First of all, it is when the geographic and ethnic boundaries are crossed that the Holy Spirit occurs most densely.¹²

Second, the different ways in which the Holy Spirit comes upon each group of people in Jerusalem (Acts 2), Samaria (Acts 8), and Cornelius' household (Acts 10) is problematic to those who look for a pattern for Spirit-Baptism.¹³ On the contrary, they illuminate the incorporating work of the Spirit when the disciples cross the boundaries. As the narrative unfolds, geographical markers signal the movement of the narrative with the Spirit's initiatives. It is in Acts 8:1 when the narrative repeats the geographical markers for the second time after Acts 1:8. "That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1). With this signal, the narrative moves to Samaria in Acts 8. Before the narrative moves again to Cornelius' household in Acts 10, we hear of the geographical markers in Acts 9:31 ["Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers"].¹⁴ These specific geographical markers—

⁸ Wenk, *Community-Forming*, 303.

⁹ Aaron Kuecker, *The Spirit and the 'Other': Social Identity, Ethnicity and Intergroup Reconciliation in Luke-Acts* (LNTS 444; London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 1.

¹⁰ Loveday Alexander, "Mapping Early Christianity: Acts and the Shape of Early Church History", *Interpretation* (2003): 164.

¹¹ Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2009), 43.

¹² Kuecker, *Spirit*, 99, 188.

¹³ Menzies, see ch.11.

¹⁴ Acts 10:39 (Judaea and Jerusalem)

Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria (and Phoenicia) and the Gentiles—are mentioned for the last time in Acts 15:1–4 just before the Jerusalem Council where the issues of the crossing of the boundaries are settled in agreement with the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28).

Finally, why does Luke list the geographical markers the way he does: Jerusalem, Judaea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth? On the one hand, it reflects, what Richard Bauckham calls, “the movement of the biblical narrative [which] runs from one place to every place, from the centre to the periphery, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth”.¹⁵ It shows the image of “the ‘centrifugal’ movement out in Jerusalem to the rest of the world”, different from the common depiction of the Old Testament, the image of “the ‘centripetal’ movement to the centre in Jerusalem from the rest of the world”.¹⁶ On the other hand, the sequence of Judaea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth may indicate ethnic referents as the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles. As Kuecker notes, “geography for Luke is a signifier of a primarily ethnic referent.”¹⁷ In this respect, ‘the ends of the earth’ (ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς)¹⁸ refers to the Gentiles¹⁹ while the phrase in its allusion to Isa 49:6 LXX (also in Acts 13:47; cf. εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in Luke 24:47) highlights the universal extent of God’s salvation.²⁰ Besides the inclusion of Samaria between Jerusalem and the ends of the earth not only recalls Luke’s particular interest in Samaria and in Samaritans for that matter,²¹ but also signifies an ambiguous nature of the Samaritans in their relation to the Jews. Hence Acts 1:8 provides “a summary”²² of the subsequent narratives of the coming of the Spirit in Jerusalem, Samaria, and Cornelius’ household, anticipating the crossing of both geographical and ethnic boundaries with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.²³

The Holy Spirit and the Crossing of the Boundaries

The Holy Spirit in Jerusalem in Acts 2

¹⁵ Richard Bauckham, “Mission as Hermeneutic for Scriptural Interpretation,” in *Reading the Bible Missionally* (ed. Michael Goheen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 31.

¹⁶ Richard Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Community,” in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (eds. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 71.

¹⁷ Kuecker, *Spirit*, 99.

¹⁸ Isa. 8:9; 48:20; 49:6; 62:11; Ps. Sol. 1:4; Acts 1:8; 13:47

¹⁹ S.G. Wilson, *Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* (SNTSMS 23; Cambridge: CPU, 1973), 94; Pao, *New Exodus*, 94. Contra. It refers to Rome or Ethiopia. C.K. Barrett, *Acts 1–14* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 6; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PN: Westminster, 1971), 144; Ps. Sol. 8:15; Strabo, *Geography* 3.1.8. See Thomas Moore, “‘To the End of the Earth’: The Geographical and Ethnic Universalism of Acts 1:8 In Light of Isaianic Influence on Luke,” *JETS* (1997): 389–99.

²⁰ Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (SP; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992), 27. Also the universal scope of God’s salvation is highlighted in Luke 2:30-32; 3:6; Acts 2:21.

²¹ Luke 9:52; 10:29-37; 17:11-19

²² Beverly Gaventa, “‘You Will Be My Witness’: Aspects of Mission in the Acts of the Apostles,” *Missiology: An International Review* (1982): 416.

²³ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, vol.1: Introduction and 1:1-2:47* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 697.

The centrality of Jerusalem is noted both in Luke’s Gospel and Acts in general and is highlighted as the place where the movement begins in Luke 24:47 and Acts 1:8 in particular. It is in Jerusalem that the apostles are told to wait for ‘the promise of the Father’ (Acts 1:4). Indeed, the narrative initially focuses on Jerusalem where the promise is fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (2:1–4) till the church is firmly established (Acts 1:1—8:3).

The repeated emphasis of ‘all living in Jerusalem’ (οἱ κατοικοῦντες Ἱερουσαλήμ πάντες) in the narrative of Acts 1—7 before it moves to Samaria is striking. All the residents of Jerusalem (πᾶσιν τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν Ἱερουσαλήμ) know what has taken place among them (Acts 1:19; cf. Luke 24:18). All Jews living in Jerusalem (εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ κατοικοῦντες Ἰουδαῖοι; οἱ κατοικοῦντες Ἱερουσαλήμ πάντες) see and hear the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:5) and are given the interpretation of the event (2:14). All Jewish rulers and religious leaders gather in Jerusalem to hear Peter (Acts 4:5) since the healing of the lame man has become known to all living in Jerusalem (πᾶσιν τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν Ἱερουσαλήμ, 4:16). A great number of people in and around Jerusalem (τὸ πλῆθος τῶν πέριξ πόλεων Ἱερουσαλήμ) are benefited from the ministry of the apostles (Acts 5:16). In fact, the whole city of Jerusalem is filled with the teaching about Jesus (πεπληρώκατε τὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ τῆς διδαχῆς ὑμῶν, Acts 5:28). As a result, the number of the disciples, including priests, increases greatly in Jerusalem (Acts 6:7).

With this emphasis in Jerusalem, the discussion in this section focuses on two salient aspects highlighted in the Pentecost account in Acts 2:1) the coming of the Holy Spirit, and 2) the crossing of the cultural-linguistic and the socio-economic boundaries. First, a brief description of the coming of the promised Spirit (Acts 2:1–4) is followed by a long list of nations and ethnic names (2:9–11). Whether the list of the “countries and races”²⁴ corresponds to the table of nations in Genesis 10 as some argue²⁵ or to the other geographic lists in antiquity²⁶ remains unresolved. What appears less problematic is the intention of the narrative which presents “Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem” (Acts 2:5) as the ingathering of the dispersed Israel at the coming of the eschatological Spirit. Peter’s altered citation of the prophet Joel (3:1–5a LXX) begins with “in the last days” (Acts 2:17). This alteration makes it clear that the coming of the Spirit signals the coming of the eschatological age which strongly alludes to the renewal of Israel.²⁷

However, the specific empowerment of the Spirit is depicted in terms of the apostles’ ability to speak in other languages, representing the cultural and linguistic diversity of the diaspora Jews present at the scene. Acts says that the Spirit enables them to speak in ‘foreign languages’ (ἐτέραις γλώσσαις in Acts 2:4). The nature of this tongue is further elaborated

²⁴ Barrett, *Acts 1–14*, 121.

²⁵ For the detailed discussion on each nation and race, see James M. Scott, *Geography in Early Judaism and Christianity: The Book of Jubilees* (SNTSMS 113; Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 68–82.

²⁶ Justin Taylor, “The List of the Nations in Acts 2:9–11”, *RB* (1999): 408–20; Martin Hengel, “Ἰουδαία in the Geographical List of Acts 2:9–11 and Syria as ‘Greater Judea’”, *BBR* 10.2 (2000): 161–80.

²⁷ μετὰ ταῦτα in Joel 3:1 LXX; ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις in Acts 2:17; Scott, *Geography*, 67–68.

through the lips of the diaspora Jews as ‘the native language’ (τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ in Acts 2:6) and as ‘our own language to which we were born’ (τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἡμῶν ἐν ᾗ ἐγεννήθημεν in 2:8). Once again, Acts 2:11 refers back to the languages (ταῖς ἡμετέραις γλώσσαις) with the content of their speaking, “God’s deeds of power”. Intriguingly enough, what the narrative of Pentecost in Acts 2 underscores is the cultural-linguistic diversity with a detailed list of different places and races, and the Spirit’s enabling of the apostles to speak in various languages, which may not be necessary for communication purposes but is clearly boundary crossing.²⁸ This empowerment initiates the puzzled and amazed responses of the crowd, asking the meaning of the whole event of Pentecost (Acts 2:12).

Second, Peter’s seminal speech (Acts 2:14–36) is responded by the mass baptism of three thousand (2:41) which forms the multi-cultural community of early believers in Jerusalem. This community is not only formed as “the immediate consequence of Pentecost” (Acts 2:42–47; 4:31–37) but also the life reflected in the community “should certainly be interpreted as a result of reception of the gift of the Spirit.”²⁹ One of the key features of this Spirit-filled culturally diverse community is their unity (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ as in Acts 2:1; καρδία καὶ ψυχὴ μία in 4:32), depicted in terms of their sharing of possessions, (εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινὰ in Acts 2:44; 4:32). Their use of wealth which meets others’ needs (Acts 2:45; 4:34–35) indeed portrays the renewed people with the power of the Spirit.³⁰ While the narrative in Acts 2 gives a detailed account of the cultural-linguistic diversity at the outset, the life of the community gives a glimpse of their socio-economic diversity as “the gathering of the poor and the rich, landless and landowners, and haves and have-nots”.³¹

Hence it is the Holy Spirit who enables the 120 disciples, mostly Galileans, to speak God’s message by crossing cultural-linguistic boundaries amongst the diaspora Jews from all over the world. Also, it is the Holy Spirit who empowers those who welcome the message to cross socio-economic boundaries and to be of one heart and soul, sharing everything in common (Acts 4:32; 2:44). Now with the establishment of the church in Jerusalem, the narrative moves from Jerusalem to Samaria.

The Holy Spirit in Samaria in Acts 8

A severe persecution arises in Jerusalem and scatters the disciples except the apostles to move to Judaea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). The narrative highlights the successful witnessing of Philip in the city of Samaria. All seems well until we hear that the Holy Spirit has not come upon any of the Samaritans after they believe and are baptised (Acts 8:16). This puzzles some scholars. C.K. Barrett concludes: “Luke is describing a special case”³² whereas James Dunn thinks that

²⁸ Kuecker calls this language miracle “unnecessary” since “the entire list of Diaspora identities falls into either Aramaic-speaking (eastern Diaspora) or Greek-speaking (western Diaspora) locales”. See, *Spirit*, 116.

²⁹ Turner, *Power*, 152. See Wenk who argues the inseparable link between the Holy Spirit and the life of the community in *Community-Forming*, 270.

³⁰ Acts 4:34 strongly echoes Deut. 15:4 LXX.

³¹ MiJa Wi, *The Path to Salvation in Luke’s Gospel: What Must We Do?* (LNTS 607; London: T&T Clark, 2019), 19.

³² Barrett, *Acts 1–14*, 412. “Luke is describing a special case.”; Pervo, *Acts*, 213.

Samaritan's response (they believed Philip in Acts 8:12) is not right despite Philip's orthodox teaching.³³ However, the response of the Samaritans is described as "with one accord" (ὁμοθυμαδὸν Acts 8:6) which is a typical expression to depict the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25)³⁴ and as "great joy" (πολλή χαρὰ 8:8). Then, what is the reason for the delay of the Spirit? Wenk offers an ecclesiological reason for the delay as the account captures "the story of reconciliation between Jerusalem and Samaria".³⁵ Pervo indicates the necessity of the "authentication" from the church in Jerusalem.³⁶ More convincing is V.J. Samkutty's suggestion in his discussion of *The Samaritan Mission in Acts*. He argues: "The transformation needed to happen not in the Samaritans, but in the Jerusalem based apostles."³⁷

The delay of the Spirit draws our attention to the ethnic and geographic movement from Jerusalem to Samaria in Acts 8:14–15. This short account closely corresponds to the encounter with the Samaritans in Luke 9:51–56.³⁸ Luke's interest in the Samaritans is marked in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33–35) and the grateful Samaritan leper (17:12–19), both of whom epitomise the ones "who [do] the right thing".³⁹ On the contrary, the Samaritans in Luke 9:51–56 express their hostility to Jesus and more so toward Jerusalem. They (κώμη Σαμαριτῶν Luke 9:52) do not receive (δέχομαι) him and this provokes James and John's request for fire from heaven to come down (καταβαίνω) to destroy them (Luke 9:53–54). In Acts 8, when the apostles hear the news that the Samaritans receive (δέχομαι) the word, Peter and John go down (καταβαίνω) and pray that they may receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14–15). Most notably, with the coming of the Holy Spirit or perhaps fire from heaven upon the Samaritans, Peter and John are empowered to witness to many villages in Samaria (πολλὰς ... κώμας τῶν Σαμαριτῶν) on their way back to Jerusalem (Acts 8:25). Hence the account in Acts 8 reverses the situation in Luke 9.⁴⁰ Is it possible that the Holy Spirit might be waiting for Peter and John until they come down? Peter and John's witnessing to the coming of the Spirit upon the Samaritans empowers them to cross the ethnic boundaries tainted with hostility.

As noted, Samaria is the "transitional" place and the ethnic identity of the Samaritans are ambiguous in their relation to the Jews.⁴¹ The Samaritan account is sandwiched between the establishment of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2–7) and the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Following the coming of the Holy Spirit in Samaria, the narrative introduces an

³³ James D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 110. Philip's ministry to the Samaritans includes proclaiming the Messiah and the good news of the Kingdom of God, healing the sick and exorcising the unclean spirits (Acts 8:5–7, 12).

³⁴ cf. Acts 7:57; 12:20; 18:12; 19:29

³⁵ Wenk, *Community-Forming*, 293.

³⁶ Pervo, *Acts*, 213.

³⁷ V.J. Samkutty, *The Samaritan Mission in Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 176.

³⁸ Samkutty, *Samaritan*, 175–225.

³⁹ Pervo, *Acts*, 203.

⁴⁰ I found Samkutty's careful observation of the two accounts in Luke 9 and Acts 8 particularly helpful. See *Samaritan*, 175–76.

⁴¹ Pervo, *Acts*, 43. Note the Samaritan leper is called ἀλλογενής in Luke 17:18. Jesus tells the disciples not to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans in their mission (Matt 10:5).

Ethiopian eunuch, “a character full of ambiguities”.⁴² His ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status are unexpected.⁴³ He is an Ethiopian, but a worshipper in Jerusalem and a reader of the Prophet Isaiah. He is a high court official (δυνάστης), but a eunuch (εὐνοῦχος), “demonized and ostracised in antiquity” and “excluded” from participation in Jewish worship (Acts 8:27–28).⁴⁴ Eric Barreto remarks that “it is precisely the ambiguity and complexity of his identity that draws Luke’s attention”.⁴⁵ The eunuch’s “liminal” posture in ethnicity and gender has also drawn much scholarly attention.⁴⁶ But throughout the narrative (Acts 8:27, 34, 36, 38, 39), he is referred to as a eunuch—most likely “a castrated male”—by his gender liminal identity.⁴⁷

The eunuch’s ambiguous status recalls Naaman in Luke 4:27 and his encounter with Philip echoes the two disciples’ encounter with Jesus on the road of Emmaus.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the eunuch’s story most closely corresponds to the Cornelius’. In both accounts, the Spirit directly speaks to Philip and Peter, directs their meeting with the eunuch and Cornelius, and pushes their crossing of the boundaries. The angel of the Lord leads Philip to the road (ὁδός) in the wilderness where the eunuch’s chariot is to be found and the Spirit speaks to him to go (πρόσελθε) and join (κολλήθητι) the chariot (Acts 8:29). The eunuch invites him to join and to ask for the interpretation of the scripture, which reads:

Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer (κείραντος),
so he does not open his mouth.
In his humiliation (ταπεινώσει) justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away (αἴρω) from the earth. (Acts 8:32–33; Isa 53:7–8 LXX)

It is no wonder that the eunuch is intrigued by the precise identity of this figure in Isaiah (Acts 8:34). Perhaps he finds “a tragic counterpart of his own life story”⁴⁹: the one “before its ‘cutter’ reduced to silence in humiliation”.⁵⁰ Moreover, the latter part of the scripture still requires an interpretation whether it means the death (αἴρω) of this figure or his vindication (αἴρω).

⁴² Eric D. Barreto, “A Gospel on the Move: Practice, Proclamation, and Place in Luke-Acts”, *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 72.2 (2018): 183.

⁴³ Brittany E. Wilson, *Unmanly Men: Refigurations of Masculinity in Luke-Acts* (Oxford: OPU, 2015), 135.

⁴⁴ Mikael C. Parsons, *Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2006), 134–35.

⁴⁵ Barreto, “Gospel”, 183.

⁴⁶ Wilson, *Unmanly*, 117.

⁴⁷ Wilson, *Unmanly*, 117, 141.

⁴⁸ F. Scott Spencer, “The Ethiopian Eunuch and His Bible: A Social-science Analysis”, *BTB* 22 (1992): 156; Pervo, *Acts*, 219. Note both the eunuch and Naaman’s physical defect and high office.

⁴⁹ Spencer, “Eunuch”, 158. He says ‘maybe not’ to this comment as he highlights the latter part of the scripture where “a more hopeful outcome” is suggested.

⁵⁰ Parsons, *Body*, 138.

Here Philip opens his mouth and shares “the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35), which points to the vindication. Upon hearing the message, the eunuch boldly asks: “What is to prevent (κωλύει) me from being baptised?” (Acts 8:37) Without any objection, the eunuch is incorporated into ‘the Way’ (ὁδός Acts 9:2) through the baptism and he goes on his way (ὁδός) rejoicing.⁵¹ Hence the eunuch’s three questions shape the narrative: 1) the interpretation of the scripture, 2) the identity of the figure in his reading, and 3) the request to be baptised (Acts 8:31, 34, 36). The narrative on the one hand anticipates and fulfils the promise given to the foreigners (ὁ ἀλλογενής) and the eunuchs (ὁ εὐνοῦχος) in Isa 56:3–8. It on the other hand shows how the Spirit orchestrates their encounter and challenges Philip to join this ethnically and sexually liminal person so that the eunuch may be incorporated into ‘the Way’ (ὁδός).

The Holy Spirit at Cornelius’ household in Acts 10

Scholars have noted that the Ethiopian eunuch may represent a figure from ‘the ends of the earth’ as Ethiopia is considered as such and that his conversion may indicate the fulfilment of Jesus’ promise in Acts 1:8.⁵² As noted, however, his ambiguity as a liminal figure sits well within the narrative movement before arriving at Cornelius’ household in Caesarea. The travel between Joppa, “a stronghold for Jewish nationalists”, where Peter stays and Caesarea, “the Roman capital of Judaea and ... a symbol of gentile power”⁵³ indicates the geographic and ethnic movement between Jews and Gentiles.⁵⁴ The activity of the Spirit in this movement is intense (Acts 10:19, 38, 44, 45; 11:12, 15, 16).⁵⁵

First of all, the Spirit prepares Cornelius and Peter through the visions during their prayers (Acts 10:3, 9, 30; 11:5). The angel of the Lord speaks to Cornelius in Caesarea, affirming God’s acceptance of his prayer and offerings. In the meantime, Peter is perplexed by the triple vision of all kinds of animals, both clean and unclean, and by the command to eat them (Acts 10:11–16). The distinction (διακρίνω) between clean (κάθαρτος) and unclean (ἀκάθαρτος) or profane (κοινός) stands in tension with the command of the Spirit to make no distinction (μηδὲν διακρίναντα in Acts 10:20; 11:12; 15:9; cf. 11:2).⁵⁶ Indeed, Barreto notes: “The key refrain of the vision is that ‘What God has made clean (καθαρίζω), you must not call profane’” (Acts 10:15; 11:9).⁵⁷ The lawful boundary between a Jew (Ἰουδαῖος) and a Gentile (ἀλλόφυλος) (Acts 10:28), the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (μεταξὺ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν) (15:8) is challenged by the Spirit’s action. Peter’s vision about clean and unclean animals is interpreted in terms of God’s cleansing of what is unclean and his acceptance of the Gentiles by giving the gift of the Holy

⁵¹ Wilson, *Unmanly*, 117. Note the frequent occurrences of ὁδός here in Acts 8:26, 29, 39 and the first use of ὁδός as a technical term, referring to the disciples, follows in Acts 9:2. Paul also encounters Jesus on the road (9:17, 27).

⁵² Barrett, *Acts 1–14*, 424.

⁵³ Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY: WJK, 2016), 240.

⁵⁴ Benjamin R. Wilson, “Jew-Gentile Relations and the Geographic Movement of Acts 10:1–11:18, *CBQ* 80 (2018): 87. Also see J. Kaplan, “The Archaeology and History of Tel Aviv-Jaffa”, *BA* 35.3 (1972): 91.

⁵⁵ Wenk, *Community-Forming Power*, 298; Kuecker, *Spirit*, 188.

⁵⁶ Kuecker, *Spirit*, 192.

⁵⁷ Barreto, “Gospel”, 184.

Spirit.⁵⁸ Peter as he witnesses to God's work proclaims that God cleanses (καθαρίζω) the hearts of the Gentiles, and thus makes no distinction (μηδὲν διακρίναντα) between us and them (Acts 15:8–9).⁵⁹

Secondly, the Spirit directs Peter's boundary crossing movement: "Get up, go down, and go with them", which leads to Peter's visit (προσέρχομαι) and association (κολλάω) with the Gentiles as he does to Philip.⁶⁰ The Spirit in fact initiates the movement as he first visits (ἐπισκέπτομαι) Cornelius,⁶¹ "representing all Gentiles"⁶² through the vision and then through the actual coming upon the Gentiles.⁶³ It contrasts the delay of the Spirit among the Samaritan believers. The preceding of the Spirit urges Peter to invite them for water baptism. Here Peter's remark echoes the eunuch's: "Can anyone withhold (κωλύω) the water for baptising these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47; cf. 8:37) Withholding the water baptism would be hindering God (Acts 11:17). This account is repeated to the circumcised believers in Judaea who still maintains the distinction (διακρίνω in Acts 11:2; cf. 10:20; 11:12; 15:9)⁶⁴ between the circumcised and the uncircumcised. It is in this occasion that Peter recalls Jesus' promise: "You will be baptised with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5) and reinterprets the promise given to you (ὁμείζ), not only the Jews but also the Gentiles, in the light of the coming of the Spirit upon the Gentiles (Acts 10:44–46).⁶⁵ In Peter's speech to the Cornelius' household, it remains unclear whether the promise includes the Gentiles when referring to the people (λαός) and all who believe (πάντα τὸν πιστεύοντα) (Acts 10:42–43). But it becomes explicit in Peter's recalling of the promise in Acts 11:16 that the promise of Spirit baptism is given to all, Jews and Gentiles, without distinction.

Lastly, the church in Jerusalem once again comes to settle this matter. While the Gentile believers are now brothers (ἀδελφοί), the issue arises in relation to their necessity of circumcision (Acts 15:1). Circumcision undoubtedly marks "the crossing of the boundary between the Gentile and Jewish worlds" (for men).⁶⁶ Hence the point at issue is whether they can be included to God's people "without becoming Jews".⁶⁷ Following Peter's witness to God's

⁵⁸ Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 126.

⁵⁹ Barreto, "Gospel", 184. Thiessen argues that the problem of the Gentile uncleanness is a genealogical one, rather than ritual (Parsons) or ethical (Bauckham) one. See Thiessen, *Contesting*, 131–38; Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts* (Paideia; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 150. Bauckham, "Jerusalem", 73.

⁶⁰ The Spirit tells Philip to do the same: "πρόσελθε καὶ κολλήθητι" in Acts 8:29.

⁶¹ Wenk, *Community-Forming Power*, 300.

⁶² Gaventa, "Witness", 421.

⁶³ In response, the Gentiles also receive (δέχομαι) God's word.

⁶⁴ Parsons, *Acts*, 147. He notes that 'διακρίνω' in the active voice means "make a distinction" as in Acts 11:12; 15:9 while in the middle or passive voice, it means "hesitate".

⁶⁵ Kuecker, *Spirit*, 198; Holladay, *Acts*, 243.

⁶⁶ David C. Sim, "Christianity and Ethnicity in the Gospel of Matthew", *Ethnicity and the Bible* (ed. Mark G. Brett; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 176.

⁶⁷ Bauckham, "James and Gentiles (Acts 15.13-21)", *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts* (ed. Ben Witherington III; Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 168.

cleansing of the Gentiles, James' concluding remark makes this point clear by using "people" (λαός in Acts 15:18) in reference to the Gentiles (ἔθνος)⁶⁸ for the first time in Acts and by citing Amos 9:11–12 LXX. Bauckham's note is helpful in that Amos 9:12 makes the most explicit remark that the Gentiles are "included in the covenant relationship" as Gentiles.⁶⁹ The decision of the church in Jerusalem on the one hand concludes the matter in the agreement with the Holy Spirit: as it seems good to the Holy Spirit and to the church (Acts 15:28). But, on the other hand, this conclusion challenges the identity of God's people with the incorporation of the Gentiles. It is no longer Jewish ethnicity which defines the identity of God's people, but the joining of the Samaritans, the eunuch, and Cornelius' household on the way reconfigures the identity of God's people. It is no longer based on circumcision, but based on the gift of the Holy Spirit. The shift of the boundary marker from circumcision to the Holy Spirit challenges not only ethnic boundary but also gender boundary. Hence the Holy Spirit is both a cross-cultural empowering agent and a boundary marker of God's people.⁷⁰

Conclusion: The Holy Spirit as The Boundary Crosser and the Boundary Marker

I have discussed thus far highlighting the empowering work of the Holy Spirit to cross the boundaries, following Luke's narrative geography set in Acts 1:8. The coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost enables the disciples to cross cultural-linguistic boundaries and the church which is the outcome of Pentecost lives out their Spirit empowered life through overcoming socio-economic boundaries. The Spirit waits for the apostles in Jerusalem to come down and pray for the Samaritans. This transforms Peter and John and empowers them to witness to the Samaritans. The account of the eunuch's, an ethnic and gender liminal person, incorporation into God's people, is truly intriguing, imagining how the early Christians might hear the story.

Most of all, however, the boundary crossing work of the Holy Spirit is vivid when Peter and other circumcised believers are taken to Cornelius' household. Peter's transformation is depicted in several stages. He comes to understand the vision: "What God has made clean, do not call profane" (Acts 10:15, 28; 11:9; 15:9). Next, he witnesses the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles. This leads him to understand God's visitation and acceptance of the Gentiles. Then, he remembers God's promise of Spirit baptism (Acts 1:5) and reinterprets it in the light of the coming of the Spirit upon the Gentiles (11:16). Finally, this leads to the reshaping of the identity of the early Christians as the Samaritans, the eunuch, and the Gentiles join 'the Way' on the way. The Spirit is not only the boundary crosser but also is the boundary marker. It is now those who have the Spirit that are incorporated in the people of God: the church keeps pace with the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28).

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⁶⁸ Up to this point, λαός is an exclusively reserved term for the Jewish people or the people of Israel in Acts. Kuecker, *Spirit*, 205.

⁶⁹ Bauckham, "James", 169.

⁷⁰ Kuecker, *Spirit*, 200, 218–19; Wenk, *Community-Forming*, 300–303.

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