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THE NATURE OF THE PENTECOSTAL GIFT
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NUMBERS 11 AND ACTS 2

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1. Introduction

1.1 Context: Then and Now

The Holy Spirit has been at work in the community of God since the beginning of time. Though Israel had no concept of the Trinity—God in three distinct persons—they were familiar with the Spirit of God in their midst. At this early point in the development of biblical pneumatology, they viewed the Spirit of God as “God in action.” The *ruach* of Yahweh was God working, moving in the midst of his people. Through reflection on the Old Testament S/spirit tradition and through further revelation from God, the writers of the New Testament further developed a theology of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, now seen as distinct from the Father and the Son, was the agent of conversion, ongoing cleansing and enablement for evangelism. When one reads the Gospel of John, Luke-Acts, and the Pauline Epistles, it is impossible to miss the pervasive presence of the Spirit of God working in and through both the individual believer and the community of Christ. But somewhere in the history of Christendom, the role of the Holy Spirit became muddled, neglected and often, even forgotten. Certainly, pockets of believers throughout the church history have given focus to the Holy Spirit and have experienced the fullness of His work and blessing. And certainly, the main sector of the church has remained generally orthodox in its doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Though this may be the case, the Holy Spirit has long remained the bizarre third person of the Trinity; He has remained part of the creed, but excluded from the daily Christian experience, as many wonder what to do with him.

Fast forward to the early twentieth century. In the midst of the modernist’s skepticism of the supernatural, the modern Pentecostal

movement was born. Treated as an aberration, Pentecostalism was received as an untimely child by the rest of the orthodox Christian world. Apologists of the day were endeavoring to make the gospel reasonable and palatable to the modern mind, and present-day supernaturalism was not on their list of evidences to present. Nonetheless, the Pentecostal movement grew with its strong emphases of mission, miracles and experience of the Spirit. Indeed, the founders of the movement considered these to be inseparable. The Holy Spirit was depended upon for empowering in preaching the good news of Christ, and that good news would be substantiated by signs and wonders. Additionally, emphasis was placed on the imminent return of Christ. Since Christ could come at any moment for his church, believers had a great duty and passion to reach the lost around them. Pentecostal organizations were formed primarily for the purpose of providing a missions network and a vehicle for the ordination of ministers. In light of their urgency to evangelize the world, most ministerial training was intensely practical. On the other hand, theological instruction was neglected. Their unique understanding of the nature of the gift of the Spirit was the major doctrinal distinction between Pentecostals and the broader Christian context. However, because of their belief that Christ really could return for His church at any moment, their attention was given primarily to evangelism and foreign missions, not to the development of a sophisticated theology of the Spirit. Their pneumatology was satisfactory in answering the questions of their community at the time. As Pentecostals have become embraced by the broader Evangelical world in the past fifty years, the door for theological dialogue has opened. Certainly the influence has been reciprocal, but that of Pentecostalism has been stunted by its underdeveloped, often simplistic, pneumatology. The questions Pentecostals were asking decades ago are not the same questions being asked by Evangelicals (many within Pentecostalism) today. Much has happened between now and then in terms of progress in approaches to biblical interpretation, and in order to speak persuasively to the Evangelical community, Pentecostals must endeavor to shore up their theological underpinnings. Only then can they gain a hearing in order to present their distinctives in fresh, relevant ways.

In 1984, Clark Pinnock wrote these words in the forward to Roger Stronstad's first major work, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*: "Until now people have had to recognize Pentecostalism as a powerful force in the areas of spirituality, church growth, and world mission, but they have not felt it had much to offer for biblical, theological, and

intellectual foundations.”¹ He went on to laud Stronstad’s cutting-edge work and say it may turn out to be the first wave in the coming swell of engaging Pentecostal scholarship. Indeed, his prediction has proven right. Stronstad has continued to add weight to Pentecostal theology, in addition to Robert Menzies, French Arrington, Wonsuk Ma and others. These and others have stepped up to the challenge of significantly communicating a biblical and relevant Pentecostal pneumatology. It is in the context of this stimulating, progressive atmosphere that this brief paper is written.

1.2 Thesis

It is the goal of this paper to adequately communicate a solidly biblical Pentecostal understanding of the nature of the gift of the Spirit. In the first part, I will examine Numbers 11 and Acts 2. These two texts will serve as a foundation for an adequate understanding of the nature of the gift of the Spirit. Then I will discuss the implications of Numbers 11 and Acts 2 for a Pentecostal pneumatology.

2. Two Key Texts: Foundations for Pentecostal Theology

2.1 Numbers 11

In traditional presentations of Pentecostal theology, the Old Testament has been given little attention. One needs only to look at the sections devoted to Spirit baptism in the two standard theology textbooks used in many Assemblies of God Bible colleges for proof.² In fact, the Old Testament is never referenced therein in regard to the gift of the Spirit. This lack of attention has been noted by Pentecostal scholar Wonsuk Ma in a recent article: “[The] Old Testament has been systematically ignored by Pentecostal scholarship when it comes to any Pentecostal doctrine, and...the OT provides a surprisingly rich pattern for

¹ Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody: MA: Hendrickson, 1984), pp. vii-viii.

² William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1993), pp. 121-32. John W. Wyckoff, “The Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” in *Systematic Theology*, revised edition, ed. Stanley M. Horton (Springfield, MO: Logion, 1995), pp. 423-56.

the current subject.”³ Exceptions to this are made when one recognizes that the Old Testament has been examined thematically in order to provide a foundation for a fuller New Testament Pentecostal theology. One example is Roger Stronstad who presents a convincing case for Luke’s pneumatology building upon themes of the S/spirit tradition in the Old Testament.⁴ (His findings will be discussed further below.) This said, it seems that the Old Testament deserves a more in-depth look when examining the whole of Scripture for Pentecostal foundations. The text that serves as the major case in point here is Numbers 11, which will now be examined.

The importance of Numbers 11 to Pentecostal theology cannot be overstated. Numbers 11 is to the Old Testament what Acts 2 is to the New. If Acts 2 serves as the key text in understanding Pentecostal pneumatology in the New Testament, Numbers 11 serves as the key text in the Old Testament. Or, as Roger Cotton puts it, “Numbers 11 should be considered as the foundational Charismatic/Pentecostal passage in the Old Testament.”⁵ It is the goal of this section to show Numbers 11 as a foundation for Pentecostal theology. Indeed, as will be shown, Acts 2 is informed by and is a fulfillment of Numbers 11. The parallels between the two texts are apparent and point to the foundational value of Numbers 11.

Numbers 11 begins with an oft-repeated scene in the 40-year journey of the Israelites to the Promised Land. Once again the people are described as grumbling against God. Though the nature of their complaint is not intimidated, the severity of it is made obvious as Yahweh responds by destroying some of those on the fringes of the camp. It very well may have been those on the outskirts of the camp who had initiated the potential mutiny. Moses quickly intercedes for the people, and Yahweh relents. Almost inconceivable to the reader, the Israelites soon commence their grumbling, inspired by the “rabble” with them. This time the nature of their complaint is given: the manna God had been miraculously providing had ceased to satisfy their tastes. They wish instead to return to Egypt where they were provided with meat and

³ Wonsuk Ma, “‘If It Is a Sign’: An Old Testament Reflection on the Initial Evidence Discussion,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2:2 (1999), pp. 163-75 (164).

⁴ Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), pp. 13-26.

⁵ Roger D. Cotton, “The Pentecostal Significance of Numbers 11,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10:1 (October 2001), pp. 3-10 (3).

vegetables. Yes, there they had been in slavery to evil taskmasters, but at least they had good food to eat! Though at first glance their complaint may seem of little significance to the modern reader, God himself perceives the foundational issue: “[Y]ou have rejected the LORD, who is among you” (Num 11:20b). The very people Yahweh had heard crying out in desperation in their captivity, the very people he had graciously and miraculously delivered from captivity, the very people in whose midst he was dwelling constantly prefer to return to slavery in Egypt. The renewed complaining causes Moses to be “troubled” and Yahweh to be “exceedingly angry” (v. 10). In his utter despair, Moses cries out to God and attempts to disassociate himself from the people. Moses further attempts to resign from his leadership post, even preferring that God would kill him than make him go on with them.

God shows mercy to Moses by giving him solutions to both the smaller, immediate food issue and the more significant, ongoing leadership issue. Though it will serve ultimately as a judgment to the people, God gives them quail to satisfy their requests for meat (vv. 18-23). More importantly, he promises to provide leadership assistance to Moses (vv. 16-17).

Moses carries out God’s instructions, bringing together seventy elders in the Tent of Meeting. God descends in the cloud of his presence, and after speaking with Moses, takes “the Spirit that was on [Moses] and put[s] the Spirit on the seventy elders” (v. 25). It is important to note that the Spirit given to the elders is the Spirit of God, not of Moses. The Spirit is here linked directly to Moses most likely in order to maintain his primacy of authority as leader over Israel in the eyes of the community. Though the others too receive the Spirit, Moses is still in charge. The Spirit is “taken” from Moses and distributed to the others. However, the Spirit cannot be reduced to mere quantitative terms. The Spirit upon Moses is not lessened because of the “sharing” with the seventy; rather, as Milgrom puts it, “the divine spirit, like wisdom or candlelight, can be given to others without any diminution of its source.”⁶

A glance back at verse 17 informs the reader of the purpose of this giving of the Spirit to the elders: “They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.” Yahweh gives his Spirit to the elders in order to empower them for their newly ordained vocation. By the power of the Spirit, they will carry out their mission of assisting Moses in the leadership of Israel. Stronstad traces a “vocational

⁶ Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. 89.

motif" of the Spirit in the Old Testament. The Spirit gives craftsmanship skills, military prowess and an ability to lead people.⁷ Though Stronstad does not explicitly include the elders of Numbers 11 in his description of the motif, they certainly fit well as they are enabled to lead the people by the Spirit. Hildebrandt agrees: "[T]he *ruach* served to enable them with the necessary resources for their task."⁸

It is important to note that the seventy are probably not being commissioned into the specific office of prophet such as Isaiah or Jeremiah later were. The idea of the prophet is in its beginning stages of development at this time. Also, it is Moses who would fulfill the role of prophet for the journeying Israel. The prophesying attributed to the elders is no doubt given as a sign for themselves, Moses and the entire community. The sign serves to substantiate outwardly what the Spirit accomplished inwardly by way of gifting them for their task. Most commentators would agree on this purpose of the sign.⁹ Roland Allen is representative: "It seems that the temporary gift of prophecy to these elders was primarily to establish their credentials as Spirit-empowered leaders rather than to make of them ongoing agents of the prophecy of the Spirit."¹⁰ As it pertains to the speech itself, it seems clear that the "prophesying" was not the typical prophetic forthtelling or foretelling; rather, it seems to be of the same ecstatic character of the prophesying of Saul in 1 Samuel 10:9-11. Among others, respected Old Testament scholar Gordon Wenham suggests that it was "probably an unintelligible ecstatic utterance, what the New Testament terms speaking in tongues, not the inspired, intelligible speech of the great Old Testament prophets and the unnamed prophets of the early church."¹¹

Whatever one's view on the nature of the speech, there is no doubt as to its function. The intent of the speech is to verify God's appointing and enabling for a task. The Spirit was demonstrably given to empower

⁷ Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, p. 23.

⁸ Wilf Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), p. 111.

⁹ Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 89. Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God*, pp. 110-111. Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, p. 22.

¹⁰ Roland B. Allen, "Numbers," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reference Software, 1989-1998), 11:25.

¹¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981), p. 109. Cf. Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 89.

the elders to assist Moses in the immense task of leading the people of Israel through the wilderness. Though the connection here will be developed later, Allen's comment is helpful here: "The Christian cannot but think of Pentecost in Acts 2. In a sense what occurred here in the desert is a presentment ahead of time of the bestowal of the Spirit on the believers in the Upper Room."¹²

An unexpected turn of events is recorded in verses 26-29. While the seventy elders are prophesying inside the Tent of Meeting, the Spirit comes upon two others, Eldad and Medad. They are said to be registered with Moses as leaders, but for some reason they do not come to the Tent. Nonetheless, God has put the Spirit upon them as well. Joshua, fearing the usurpation of Moses' authority—as these two are not connected directly with Moses in their reception of the Spirit—pleads with Moses to rebuke them. Moses gives his famous inspired wish (v. 29): "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" In reference to the experience of Eldad and Medad, Hildebrandt coins the phrase "democratization of the Spirit."¹³ Olson sees Eldad and Medad being in addition to the seventy elders, and not a part of that group of "institutional leadership." He holds that their prophesying, Moses' support of this, and Moses' subsequent wish point to the importance of prophetic roles of those outside the formal leadership.¹⁴ Coupled with Moses' prophetic wish that all would prophesy, this certainly points ahead to Joel 2:28-29, and further ahead to the fulfillment in Acts 2:1-41 as all believers are invited to receive prophetic empowering for mission.

2.2 Acts 2

As aforementioned, early Pentecostals were concerned more with evangelism and missions than with the refinement of their theology. Though they caught "instinctively" the importance of Acts 2 for their theology, they were not always adept at sound hermeneutics, using biblical analogy (among other methods) to support their distinctive doctrine. Until recently, Pentecostals have been content with their original theological foundations on issues of the Spirit.

¹² Allen, "Numbers," 11:25.

¹³ Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God*, p. 190.

¹⁴ Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1996), pp. 68-69.

Another consideration is the opportunity provided for Pentecostals by the changing face of Evangelical hermeneutics. Until recently, Luke's narrative material had been interpreted exclusively in the light of Pauline didactic material. Bernard Ramm, John Stott and Gordon Fee, in reaction to the abuses of German redaction criticism, represented the Evangelical community by responding negatively to the view that narrative could serve in a normative way theologically.¹⁵ Luke was not a theologian, but a careful historian: his intention was to recount, not to teach. However, the scene in hermeneutics began to shift with the appearance of *Luke: Historian and Theologian* by I. Howard Marshall.¹⁶ Many other Evangelical scholars have followed in his footsteps, including Joel Green, Grant Osborne and Craig Blomberg. The thought that historical narrative has no theological value is a view that is largely rejected today. This has leveled the playing ground for Pentecostals as Luke-Acts has always been of great significance for Pentecostal theology. Encouraged by this shift, Pentecostal theologians such as Roger Stronstad and Robert P. Menzies have studied Luke-Acts and have come to the conclusion that Luke presents a pneumatology distinct to that of Paul, though complimentary. Through extensive research in the Old Testament and other ancient sources, both assert that Luke continues in the line of the Hebrew conception of the Spirit as charismatically enabling individuals.¹⁷ Elsewhere, Menzies, referencing his critic James Dunn, summarizes his findings on Lukan pneumatology: "The crucial point of disagreement with Dunn was my insistence that Luke never attributes soteriological functions to the Spirit and that his narrative presupposes a pneumatology excluding this dimension. Or, to put it positively, Luke describes the gift of the Spirit exclusively in charismatic terms as the source of power for effective witness."¹⁸

¹⁵ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics* (Boston, MA: Wilde, 1956); John R. W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1976); Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *Reading the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981).

¹⁶ I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971).

¹⁷ Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, pp. 13-26. Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts*, JPT Supplement Series 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), p. 227.

¹⁸ William W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations for Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), p. 70. It is not

To provide context for the Pentecost account of Acts 2, one must consider Luke 24:36-49. The disciples have just received news that Jesus had just appeared to two disciples as they walked along the road. In the midst of their astonishment, Jesus appears in the place in which they are meeting. After assuring them that it was he, Jesus reminds them that only that which was already prophesied about the Messiah had happened. “He opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures” (v. 45). Luke records a synopsis of what had been fulfilled in Jesus, then includes Jesus’ last instructions to his disciples: “You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high (vv. 48-49). In Acts 1:8, Luke records something similar, likely said by Jesus during the same meeting: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The second chapter of Acts begins with the disciples obeying Jesus’ instruction to wait in the city. They are waiting (probably in prayer) together in an upper room when the sound of a wind was heard and tongues of fire were seen, and “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4). Possibly spilling out into public view, the disciples are noticed by onlookers in town for Pentecost. In response to their questions, Peter stands up to preach. Beginning in Acts 2:16, Peter proclaims to the crowd that what they are observing among the gathered 120 is the fulfillment of what the prophet Joel had foretold in 2.28-32. Peter goes on to quote Joel 2.28-32 basically in its entirety as seen in Acts 2:17-21. At the outset of the prophecy, Peter changes “and afterward” to “in the last days.”¹⁹ Of all the editing Peter does to Joel’s text, only this instance seems to amplify what was originally spoken. Joel’s “and afterward” is ambiguous. By adapting Joel’s saying, Peter asserts that the outpouring of the Spirit that is taking place in his midst is to be interpreted as the genesis of the “last days,” or end times. Menzies agrees: “Luke’s application of the Joel text to Pentecost—and particularly his alteration of 2:17—highlights the eschatological significance of the Pentecostal gift.”²⁰ Peter does edit Joel in a few other

the purpose of this paper to go into depth on this issue. Rather, this information was given to provide context for the examination of Luke 2.

¹⁹ It is recognized that Luke, serving as redactor, shapes his material to some degree. However, for simplicity, “Peter” will be used here rather than “Luke.”

²⁰ Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*, p. 189.

instances, though they seem to be nothing more than slight clarifications. In one case, he switches the order of two parallel lines (2:17b); in a couple other instances, he adds words (v. 19a) and a phrase (v. 18b); and, in verse 20, Peter substitutes “glorious” for “dreadful,” the terms seeming to be synonymous. It should be noted that Peter also ends his quotation without including Joel 2:32b: “for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls.”

Peter’s quotation of Joel in Acts 2:19-20 requires some explanation. The observable cosmic phenomena Joel anticipates are not described as having happened in Acts 2 or anywhere in the New Testament. Some, including F. F. Bruce, contend that these happenings were fulfilled in the sky during the crucifixion of Jesus.²¹ This interpretation seems foisted upon the text. The better explanation is that these events will be fulfilled on judgment day, at the coming of the Lord at the end of time. Thus, Joel’s prophecy can be seen as two bookends sandwiching the church age, with the first part being fulfilled at Messiah’s first coming, and the second part being fulfilled at his second coming. Joel, as other Old Testament prophets, probably did not envision Messiah’s coming in two parts, but one, and thus presented it as one prophecy.

Quoting Joel, Peter emphasizes that the gift of the Spirit is for all, not just a select few leaders as in the Old Testament. Rather, it is for all regardless of age, gender, or social status (Acts 2:17-18). Additionally the gift is for Jews, Gentiles and all subsequent generations (v. 39). Horton expounds on this: “The way Peter looked at Joel’s prophecy shows he expected a continuing fulfillment of the prophecy to the end of the ‘last days.’ This means also that Joel’s outpouring is available to the end of this age. As long as God keeps calling people to salvation, He wants to pour out His Spirit upon them.”²²

Most Evangelicals interpret Acts 2:38-39 as a homogenous whole, finding that it simply teaches what is necessary for inclusion in the community of believers. “The promise” is interpreted as simply the conversion-initiation of the believer. Bruce’s statement on the text is representative of the typical Evangelical. He contends that this special work of the Spirit “took place once for all...constituting them the people

²¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 62.

²² Stanley Horton, *What the Bible Says about the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), p. 147.

of God in the new age.”²³ Evangelicals hold then, that this text teaches a single-stage reception of the Spirit. In recent years, there has been some debate about this contention among scholars in the field of Luke-Acts studies. In his compelling argument, Menzies gives evidence for a two-stage reception of the Spirit. His most persuasive plank refers to the “promise” terminology used by Luke in verse 39 and elsewhere (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33, 39). “Reception of ‘the promise’ will result in the disciples being ‘clothed with power from on high,’ enabling them to be effective witness.”²⁴ Stronstad arrives at the same conclusion due to the progression of experience described. Though not a Pentecostal, Michaels states, “It is difficult to deny that Acts 2 is dealing *both* with empowerment for service *and* with salvation.”²⁵

The effects of Peter’s message and the Holy Spirit’s work are listed in Acts 2:41-47. Three thousand become believers and are baptized. Adopted into the new community, they continue to meet with other disciples of Jesus daily for encouragement, teaching, and worship. This is the description of the results of such Spirit-empowered preaching of the good news of Jesus.

3. Implications for the Pentecostal View of the Gift of the Spirit

3.1 The Gift for Vocational Empowerment

It is evident that Luke’s pneumatology is informed by Numbers 11. First, it is clear that the purpose of the Spirit’s descent on the seventy elders was for vocational empowerment. God had a task for them to complete in helping Moses effectively lead the people of Israel (Num 11:16-17). Hildebrandt agrees: “the *ruach* served to enable them with the necessary resources for their task.”²⁶ It is apparent that Luke envisioned the same purpose of the Holy Spirit, as he connected task (Great Commission, Luke 24:49) with enabling in Acts 1:8: “But you will

²³ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 70. cf. I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, TNTC, (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1980.), pp. 80-82.

²⁴ Menzies & Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 77.

²⁵ Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, pp. 69-70. J. Ramsey Michaels, “Luke-Acts,” *The Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 544-61 (554).

²⁶ Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God*, p. 111.

receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Just as the elders fulfilled their God-given mission, New Testament believers would carry out their God-given mission in the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Another probable key connection to New Testament pneumatology is explained by Luke-Acts scholar Robert Menzies. Menzies sees a further interesting connection between the phenomenon of Eldad and Medad and Lukan pneumatology. In Luke 10, Jesus sends out disciples to spread the good news of the kingdom come. Menzies contends that Luke, crafting his narrative, is harkening back to Numbers 11 when the seventy elders are authorized to carry out God’s work. In Luke 10:1 and 17, we find a textual variant as to the number Jesus sent. Some ancient manuscripts read “seventy,” while others read “seventy-two.” (Modern English Bible translations are divided on how to render it.) Since there is debate as to whether Eldad and Medad were part of the seventy or were in addition to the gathered elders (thus, seventy-two in total), Menzies sees a strong connection between the Numbers 11 narrative and Luke 10.²⁷ Determining the correct number of disciples or elders is inconsequential; the fact that early copyists were divided on the number is the key to the connection. As very early interpreters of Luke, they understood his intention to link his narrative to Numbers 11, and thus were divided between “seventy” and “seventy-two.” The importance of this insight is that it shows that historian-theologian Luke’s pneumatology is informed by that of Numbers 11. This is another connection that expresses Luke’s view of the purpose of the gift of the Spirit: for vocational empowering (as opposed to a salvific purpose).

3.2 The Gift Separate from Conversion-Initiation

In Numbers 11, the gift of the Spirit was given to those only within the community of God. The same can be said for other Old Testament references of the same kind (cf. Saul in 1 Samuel 10). Based on Acts 2:38-39, arguments for a two-stage reception of the Spirit are proved tenable by the work of Menzies, mentioned above.

He goes on to state the significance of this doctrine for the church: “The doctrine of subsequence articulates a conviction crucial for Pentecostal theology and practice: Spirit-baptism, in the Pentecostal

²⁷ This argument is developed from a personal conversation with Robert P. Menzies in Springfield, MO in April 2002.

sense, is distinct from (at least logically, if not chronologically) conversion.”²⁸

3.3 The Gift Accompanied by an Observable Sign

The most debated issue in the Pentecostal understanding of the gift of the Spirit is the issue of evidential tongues. Even many young Pentecostal Bible college students, while mostly convinced as to the issues of subsequence and purpose, stumble here. Is this aspect of the gift of the Spirit actually taught in the scripture? Is the traditional approach from historical precedent really that compelling? Why is “initial physical evidence” even needed to teach an empowering of the Spirit? Understanding the widespread debate on this issue within the denomination, Assemblies of God leadership has tried to tighten the doctrinal reins. Unfortunately, open dialogue on this issue has been disallowed or discouraged. Though there is honest discussion welcomed in the seminary, the atmosphere at the Bible college I attended was one of silent disdain for those who had questions. Unfortunately, through a recent conversation with a current upperclassman at this school, I realize the situation has remained unchanged. Fearing the consequences of losing this Pentecostal doctrine, denominational leadership has responded in alarm, putting up a wall against sincere questions. The “tightening of the ship” has not been met with the desired results in my own experience on the college campus. Instead, the reaction I have noticed firsthand has been one of confusion, frustration and rebellion on the part of future ministers and missionaries. I suggest this is no way to proceed on this issue. In order to prevent either an exodus of future leaders to other organizations or widespread underground disagreement though “disguised” through signatures on a yearly doctrinal contract, I encourage a new direction to be chosen. Certainly, one must be careful in the discussion of controversial doctrinal issues at the level of the local assembly. Undue disruption may be caused among everyday parishioners. However, in appropriate settings, a forum needs to be provided for those with honest questions so that they can be given honest answers, and so hope to arrive at thoughtful, biblical conclusions. Pentecostal colleges – in their Pentecostal doctrines classes, especially – would do well to leave behind some of the thin and unconvincing arguments of the past and instead present some of the strong material

²⁸ Menzies & Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 112.

being produced today by such Pentecostal scholars as have been referenced in this paper.²⁹

That said, I will endeavor to draw some implications from the texts examined above that will provide support for the traditional understanding of tongues speech as the “initial physical evidence.”³⁰ First, the term “observable sign” is to be preferred for this brief discussion, though it will be used interchangeably with the more traditional language.

Numbers 11 points to prophetic—or inspired—speech as a sign of vocational empowerment. In the Numbers 11 account, the ecstatic speech of the seventy elders served as a sign to them, to Moses and to the entire community that Yahweh had empowered them for the task to which he had called them. As aforementioned, this is a view that is largely unquestioned among Old Testament scholars. Even so, few have emphasized a connection between the inspired speech of the elders and the speaking in tongues that is found in the New Testament (Wenham, for example, is an exception). Fewer have gone so far as to see this sign of God’s enabling as foundational for a New Testament theology of tongues speech as “initial physical evidence”³¹ of a subsequent empowering work of the Spirit that Pentecostals term “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” This, however, is a connection that can rightly be made. Just as a sign accompanied God’s empowering of individuals in Numbers 11, so too a sign accompanied the Spirit’s empowering in Acts 2, as well as in other instances later in Acts.

Some may still ask why a sign for Spirit empowering is needed since there is no external sign necessarily accompanying salvation itself. Ma comments well here: “For the recipients, an internal and subjective sign would be sufficient to affirm God’s election. However, for the public affirmation, a more objective, external and demonstrable sign was required.”³²

²⁹ If I were teaching a college course on Pentecostal theology, I would require *Spirit and Power* by William and Robert Menzies (cited in full above) as the main text, as it points the way forward on the issue of tongues and a number of other relevant issues in Pentecostal theology, offering depth as well as breadth.

³⁰ It must be noted that the case for “initial physical evidence” is more an issue of systematic theology than biblical theology. This said, we will examine the texts at hand to see if they can be instructive in any way.

³¹ Ma, “If It Is a Sign,” p. 164 prefers “sign” and that term will be used here interchangeably.

³² Ma, “If It Is a Sign,” p. 173.

Second, the very nature of the gift suggests the connection. The purpose of the gift has been firmly established as empowering the believer for witness. It is reasonable to link this purpose of empowerment with the prophetic sign of tongues speech. The two go hand-in-hand. The purpose of the gift is to speak for God, the simplest biblical conception of a prophet. Is it unreasonable then to suppose that prophetic speech should serve as evidence for the prophethood of the individual?

3.4 The Gift Available to All (Universal)

In Numbers 11:29, Moses utters his prophetic wish that “all the Lord’s people were prophets!” Even if the reader takes this as simply an offhanded wish by Moses to vindicate Eldad and Medad at the moment, Joel takes it up and affirms that certainly all within God’s community will receive this gift of the Spirit in a day to come. Acts 2 then quotes Joel 2:28-32 with Peter expressing its current fulfillment. Peter reiterates the universality of the gift in Acts 2:39 as mentioned above. Most commentators would agree with the universality of the gift, but would disagree over what the gift actually is (part of the salvation package or a second empowering work of the Spirit).

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Missiological Implications

It is unquestioned that the great emphasis Pentecostalism has placed on missions and evangelism has been the result of the doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In the view of the Assemblies of God, the baptism in the Holy Spirit not only provides the mandate, but also the motivation and the resources to take Christ’s good news to the four corners of the earth. So great has the impact of Pentecostalism on world missions been that church historian David Barrett estimates there are over 200 million denominational Pentecostals worldwide. The figure jumps to 500 million when Charismatics are included. Pentecostals/Charismatics represent the second largest ecclesiastical body in the world, next only the Roman Catholicism. This is even more amazing when one remembers that the modern Pentecostal movement is only 100 years old. Largely because of its massive worldwide impact,

church historians (such as Harvey Cox) reference Pentecostalism as the most significant development in the twentieth century.³³

The importance of these Pentecostal distinctives is clearly seen when one considers the impetus they have provided for Pentecostalism. I will quote in its entirety, the practical concern of Robert Menzies:

Pentecostals, as we have noted, have long affirmed that the purpose of the Pentecostal gift is to empower believers to become effective witnesses. This missiological understanding of Spirit-baptism, rooted in the Pentecost account of Acts 1-2, give important definition to the experience. In contrast to introverted (e.g., “purifying”) or vague (“powerful” or “charismatic”) descriptions of Spirit-baptism (in the Lukan sense), Pentecostals have articulated a clear purpose: power for mission. However, when the distinctive character of Luke’s pneumatology is blurred and the Pentecostal gift is identified with conversion, this missiological (and I would add, Lukan) focus is lost.... This conviction, I would add, is integral to Pentecostalism’s continued sense of expectation and effectiveness in mission.³⁴

4.2 Pentecostal Theology: This Way Forward

From my research on the nature of the gift of the Spirit, I conclude there are three steps Pentecostals need to take as we head strongly on into the twenty-first century. First, we must hold true to the sense of missiological calling to which God has called us. I believe we Pentecostals have rightly stressed mission and experience of the Spirit in private and corporate settings. May we continue as a powerful force in the field of missions on into the future, as we partner with our brothers and sisters in Christ in endeavoring to fulfill the Great Commission. And may we do it with Pentecostal fervor and enabling. Second, we must allow open discussion among our future clergy as we attempt to answer their honest doctrinal questions with vigorous Pentecostal scholarship. Third, we must continue to seek theological dialogue with our Evangelical brothers and sisters. We must endeavor to present a Pentecostal theology that is as thoroughly intellectual and biblical as it is fervent and effective.

³³ Menzies & Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, p. 15. Robert P. Menzies, “The Holy Spirit in the New Testament Church” (Class notes, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, January 8, 2002).

³⁴ Menzies & Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, pp. 83, 112.