

Led by the Spirit: An Inter-textual Analysis of Acts 2

Abstract

In the book of Acts, the coming of the Holy Spirit empowered and guided early Christian leaders and their followers in building strong faith communities that were inclusive. The presence of the spirit of Lord was also essential in the life of leaders in the Old Testament as well. This article provides an Inter-Textual Analysis of Acts 2. Specially, this article examines how Old Testament scripture was interpreted and applied in the New Testament to breakdown social boundaries, restrictions, and foster inclusion in early Christian communities.

Key words: Social rhetorical criticism, inter-textual analysis, spirit of the Lord, Holy Spirit, inclusion, leadership

I. Introduction

The study of biblical literature is a complex and exciting undertaking. The end goals of which, should be sound biblical scholarship and a deeper understanding of the issues and challenges of early Christian leaders and the communities they served. However, traditional methods of biblical interpretation often ignore cultural and gender influences on the reading of sacred text. Meyers (1991) argues that the literature written on biblical interpretation during the last quarter century rarely includes any discussion on African American interpretation of scriptures. Tiffany and Ringe (1996) assert that the historical-critical method has been shaped by the values and norms of a post Enlightenment western Europe and North America. For this reason, Meyers (1991) suggest that the Eurocentric way of doing theological hermeneutics is inadequate in least industrialized nations and minority communities within Western cultures.

As an alternative, socio-rhetorical criticism can bridge the cultural and gender divide between traditional methods of biblical interpretation by focusing on the values, convictions, and beliefs found in the text and in the world we live (Robbins 1996). Robbins (1996) posits that the goal of socio-rhetorical criticism is to bring the skills we use on a daily basis into an environment of biblical interpretation. “This means interpreters are also asked to become aware of their own social location and personal interest as they attempt to approach the social location and personal interest the text embodies” (Robbins, 1996, p. 2). Socio-rhetorical criticism offers a variety of angles of

biblical exploration such as social class, social systems, people who live on the margins, and dynamics of power to reveal new meaning of ancient texts (Robbins 1996).

Within the parameters of the socio-rhetorical criticism as a method of inquiry, inter-textual analysis is aimed at exploring the interaction of the language of the text with the outside world of the text being interpreted (Robbins, 1996). According to Robbins:

A major goal of intertextual analysis is to ascertain the nature and result of processes of configuration and reconfiguration of phenomena in the world outside the text. Sometimes the text imitates another text. Sometimes the text imitates another text but places different people in it. Sometimes it inverts tradition turning the rhetoric of a previous situation on its head to create a new and distinct dramatic tradition (Robbins, 1996, p. 40).

The use of inter-textual analysis can further our understanding of how the use of Old Testament scripture functions in the New Testament. New Testament scripture makes many allusions and parallels to the Old Testament. For example, the birth of Jesus is largely viewed by the church as the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7) and prophesy of Isaiah 7:14. The author of Matthew's gospel uses Old Testament scripture to demonstrate the fulfillment and the reordering of Old Testament law. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said, "I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it." In Luke 4: Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1-2 and states that "today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearings (Luke 4:21).

The Apostle Paul also reinterprets Old Testament scripture to defend his claim of justification by grace as opposed to justification by the law. For example, Paul argues in Roman 4:13 that "it was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith" (NIV). Furthermore, in defense of those preaching the gospel and reaping rewards from it, Paul writes: For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? (1 Corinthians 9:9, NIV). The references and use of Old Testament scripture suggest that texts were shaped and reshaped by early Christian leaders to defend Christianity's claims to the Kingdom of God.

This article employs the use of Inter-textual analysis to uncover principles of leadership associated with early Christian thought in the Acts of the Apostles. In doing so, this article examines the function of the Spirit of God and the Holy Spirit in the life of leaders and the church. Moreover, this article explores the extent to which Old Testament

scripture and prophesy were used by New Testament leaders to strengthen their leadership and authority. Last, but not least, this article reflects upon Christian leadership practices that helped shape the early church.

II. Brief historical view of Luke-Acts

The Acts of the Apostles or as some scholars have appropriately suggested, the Acts of the Holy Spirit, was originally part of a two- volume work written by Luke. Hence, Luke-Acts is considered a historical account of the life of Jesus after His ascension and early church in Jerusalem. Grant (1963) argues that the book of Acts is based on an oral tradition about the early church of Jerusalem, the missions of Paul, and material about the church at Antioch of which Luke himself may have been responsible for (Grant, 1963). Brown (1997) asserts that Acts follows salvation history in that the Spirit that comes after Jesus' departure makes the Apostles ministry the legitimate continuation of Jesus' proclamation to the kingdom. "The Gentiles addressed by Luke-Acts could thus be assured that their acceptance of Jesus was no accident or aberration, but part of God's plan reaching back to creation" (Brown, 1997, p. 272).

Hill (1999) contends that Acts represents an opportunity for Gentile inclusion because of Jewish unbelief. Hill suggests that Act 3 and Roman 11 are both reminiscent of the rabbinic tradition that if Israel repented then immediately the son of David would come. Romans 11:26 states: and so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. Hill (1999) asserts that God's favor toward the Gentiles is central to Luke's gospel beginning with Jesus' proclamation in Luke 4:16-30. Finally, Luke-Acts reveals a high level of consistency in the treatment of the role of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15; 35; 41-42; Acts 1-2; Acts 10), the uses of dreams and visions (Acts 10), wealth and the poor (Luke 4:18; Luke 6:20; Luke 19:1-10; Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:32-5:2).

III. Inter-textural Analysis of Acts 2

The use of Old Testament scripture and the coming of the Holy Spirit is the presented as the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation to the Gentiles in Acts 2. The Feast of Weeks or Pentecost was a pilgrimage feast when pious Jews came from their homes to the Temple in Jerusalem (Brown, 1997). Pentecost was celebrated seven weeks or fifty days after Passover, a commemoration of God's deliverance of the children of Israel from the Egyptians. Brown (1997) argues that this re-presentation of Pentecost adds additions meaning by recalling what God had done for the chosen people in

salvation history. Furthermore, Pentecost and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit alluded to Old Testament scripture—Genesis 11—Tower of Babel.

Genesis 11:6 states: “and the Lord said, look they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they begin to do, nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them” (NRSV). Similarly, Act 2 states: when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord and in one place...they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues and the spirit gave utterance....every man heard them speak in his own language (Acts 2:1-6, paraphrased KJV). Robbins (1996) explains that references and allusions do not recite any actual text of a story, but rather point to a concept or tradition. Whereas in the Genesis passage language served as barrier to separate the people, but in the Acts 2, language is used to unite the people.

Furthermore, Robbins (1996) argues that the reconfiguration of texts recounts a situation in a manner that makes the later event new in relation to the previous event. Peter’s use of Old Testament prophecy Acts 2:16-21, also found in Joel 2:28-32 is an example of reconfiguring the text. However, Peter’s recitation of the text is not only shorter than the original text in Joel, but Peter also adds the phrase “in the last days,” which does not appear in the original text. Peter’s addition “in the last days” points to an eschatological orientation of Christianity during the early years of the church. Eschatology or the doctrine of the last things is a recurring theme in the Old and New Testament. Hill (2002) argues that Jewish expectation of a Messiah (anointed one) was an eschatological hope. Hill suggests that this early Christians saw Jesus as the anointed one through whom God’s purposes for humanity were realized. This belief pulsates through the New Testament and apart from it, there would never have been a Christianity (Hill, 2002). According to Hill, Acts: 2:18-21 illustrates this point:

In this way God fulfilled what he foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets.

In addition, Peter adds the words “God says” in the first line of Acts 2:17 to further clarify that Christianity is God’s idea. From a literary perspective, the declaration from God is a narrative amplification that adds credibility to Peter’s statements. Robbins (1996) argues that attributing speech directly to a person creates a vividness and

specificity that encourages the reader to accept the reality of this person outside the text. Acts 2:18 is also a recitation of Joel 2:29, but Peter adds the words “and they shall prophesy” to communicate that God’s prophesy is not bound by culture or social status. The coming of the Holy Spirit represents a new social order, whereby gender and social status in a largely Greco-Roman world is no longer significant.

For example, the Apostle Paul in his writings to the church at Corinth on women in the church may be viewed as socially oppressive. Paul’s statement that women should remain silent in the church is a difficult text to reconcile in the 21st century where more women are in positions of power and influence. Tamez (1991) argues that women during the ancient times were dependent upon and under the *paterfamilias* (male headed family structure). However, Paul’s suggestion that virgins and widows remain as such provided alternatives to the *paterfamilias* family structure. Celibacy offered women social freedom while eliminating the option of marriage and child rearing. Singleness seemed to spare one from the anxieties and stresses brought by marriage (1 Corinthians 7). Nonetheless, Paul’s statement concerning head covering for women while prophesying and praying suggest that women are in leadership roles in the church. Therefore, a woman’s attire in Paul’s view should be distinguishable from that of the dominant culture.

Furthermore, Luke in Acts 2:20-21 recontextualizes Joel 2:31-32 by failing to recite the larger portion of the verse. The Lord in the Joel text makes references to Yahweh, who revealed Himself to Moses. However, the Lord in the Acts text is Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, and the one foretold by the prophet Isaiah. Luke’s omission of the final part of Joel’s verse may be viewed as part of the apostolic kerygmatic proclamation. Kerygmatic proclamations are intended to bring others to the faith (Brown, 1997). Furthermore, the omission creates space and an opportunity for Luke to insert Jesus Christ into the text by using Psalm 16 to further prove Jesus death, burial, and resurrection.

Hill (2002) argues that the conviction that Christ had been raised by God gave great dynamism to the faith of early Christians. Early Christian communities also saw further meaning in Psalm 16 to counter Gnostic claims that Jesus could not have appeared in the flesh because Gnostics believed the material world was evil. Moreover, early Christian communities sought an avenue to explain Christianity to a largely Jewish audience, thereby using texts that were familiar to them. Similarly, Luke in Acts 2: 34-36 recites Psalm 110:1 to communicate Jesus’ partnership with God in heaven. The first Lord in Psalm 110:1 refers to Yahweh, but the second Lord refers to Jesus Christ.

In short, Acts: 2 uses Old Testament scripture to reinterpret and explain narrative events as eye witness accounts of the life of Jesus as told by the Apostles. Thus, the reconfiguration and recitation of Old Testament texts are used Christologically to bring others to the faith and demonstrate the consistency of God's plan for salvation from Genesis to Revelation.

IV. Leadership Application

In Old Testament scripture, the presence of the spirit of God is central in the life of leaders like Sampson and Moses. For example, Judges 14: 6 states that the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon Sampson that he rent a young lion with his bare hands. Saul, the first King of Israel prophesied after the spirit of the God came upon him in 1 Samuel 10:10. Moreover, the Lord tells Moses that after he has chosen seventy elders among the people to help him govern, He would "take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it on them and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee" (Numbers 11:16-17, KJV).

The presence of the spirit of the Lord as a basis of leadership is also found in the New Testament beginning with Jesus. Matthew 3: 16 states that after Jesus, was baptized by John the Baptist, the spirit of God descended upon him like a dove. Luke 4:1 adds that after Jesus was full of the Holy Ghost he returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Jesus states that the Holy Ghost is one that will teach and give guidance on what to say (Luke 12:12). Robertson (2005) explains that the same Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus, to heal, exorcise, is the same Spirit that empowered the Twelve to do likewise. From this view, the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts empowers leader to further the gospel through the practicing of social values such as love and altruism, service to others, and building community.

The fulfillment of Joel's prophesy, the out pouring of God's spirit, and salvation through Jesus Christ demonstrates God's love for all of creation. Acts 2:21 states: Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Winston (2002) used the word *agapao* to describe a leadership style where leaders consider the human and spiritual aspects of their followers. According to Wintston (2002) "the goal of *agapao* leadership is similar to the goal of transformational leadership in that both the leader and the follower seek to lift the other to higher levels" (p. 111). The principle of love is demonstrated by the Apostles through daily fellowship, breaking of bread together, and singleness of heart (Acts 2:46). 1 Corinthians 13 states: "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing" (NIV).

Furthermore, the principle of love is further demonstrated by the Apostles service to those in need. Acts 2:46 states: and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men, as every man had need. Servant leadership presupposes that a leader's have a social responsibility to serve the needs of others first. While Robert Greenleaf (1977) is credited with coining the term servant leader, the premise has its foundation in Jesus' teachings and the life of the Apostles and early church. Servant leadership also invokes a sense of togetherness through the sharing of life experiences between leaders and followers. To this end, leaders should have a keen awareness of the needs of their followers. Central to Luke's theology is a concern for the poor and dispossessed. In Luke 6:20 Jesus says blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God. One of the consequences of wealth is that it dislocates individuals from the needs of others. Moreover, wealth increases social stratification and can be used to divide the haves from the have not. By selling their possession and holding the wealth of the community common, the Apostles were able to address social and economic disparities in the community.

Early Christian leaders were also be concerned about building strong communities and bringing others together. The King James version uses the phrase "one accord" to describe the unity of believers on the day of Pentecost and the sense of togetherness that was characteristic of the early church. The Greek word for accord is *sumpsuchos*, which means co-spirited, similar in sentiment, and likeminded. In Acts 2:37-42, Peter preached a sermon that was consistent with the early values of Christianity (i.e., repentance and faith in Jesus Christ) and those that accepted the message were baptized and added to the church without social and economic distinctions. This runs counter to what many Christians experience each week as it has been often said that 11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Church of Corinth observed that "when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you" (1 Corinthians 11:18). If the contemporary church led more by the spirit, the unity envisioned in the Acts of the Apostles would be more fully realized.

V. Conclusion

The presence of the Holy Spirit is essential to leading with integrity and morality in the 21st century. Psalm 139:7 states that where can I go from Your Spirit? The outpouring of the Holy Spirit from a social perspective is important because it represents how God can change the course of salvation history. Whereas women, former slaves, and Gentiles had not been included, the Holy Spirit makes it possible for these groups to prophesy and participate in God's plan for salvation.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is also central to Lukan theology and leadership thought. The Holy Spirit enables leaders to lead with power, conviction, grace, and love towards others. When Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, he preached and testified with power and conviction and three thousand people were baptized and added to the church. The Holy Spirit transformed the life of Peter and others from an intrepid fisherman and disciples to confident Apostles with the power to heal, cast out demons, and teach others to follow and accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

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