

Angels and the Spirit in Luke-Acts

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Introduction

“What if S/spirit or angel has spoken to him?” (Acts 23:9) Luke’s¹ Pharisees seem unconcerned to distinguish clearly between the Spirit and angels as divine emissaries with a word for Paul. Might Luke himself be similarly unconcerned?

It is widely observed that Luke has a noteworthy interest in the Holy Spirit and, thereby, an important and distinctive contribution to bring to New Testament pneumatology.² Less scholarly comment has been offered about Luke’s interest in angels. Not only do they too receive frequent mention in Luke-Acts,³ but they are promoted there to a remarkable degree, such that at times potential arises for confusion between their place and that of the Holy Spirit himself.

This article will briefly review research conducted into Lukan pneumatology and angelology,⁴ before surveying the various ways in which angels are presented and promoted in Luke-Acts. This will be followed by a particular comparison between the role of angels and certain roles of the Spirit in Luke-Acts, considering first the similarities, and their potential consequences, and then the differences. This comparison will be conducted to clarify the extent to which Luke confuses or distinguishes the two. Finally, implications of the findings will be considered.

Review of Research

The difference between the amount of research conducted into Lukan pneumatology and that considering Lukan angelology is vast.⁵ In recent years, partially under the influence of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, the pneumatological output has accelerated, and the shelf is now well stocked. While there are unsurprising differences of emphasis and detail, scholars are widely agreed about the focus of Luke’s presentation of the Spirit. The Spirit is God’s divine agent enabling and guiding the mission that God has planned and now fulfils. Pivotal in and through Jesus, and later as the Spirit of Jesus in and through His followers, the Spirit acts on earth, enabling life with God and service to the world. The key concept of enabling is encapsulated by the references to ‘might’ or especially ‘power’ in the titles of a

¹ ‘Luke’ is used to refer to the author/narrator of Luke-Acts. This use does not imply any particular viewpoint concerning the identity of the author. Neither does reference to ‘he’ indicate a view concerning the author’s gender. Similarly, use of ‘he’ both for the Holy Spirit and for angels is not to be taken as implying ‘gender’, but merely conformity to traditional designations.

² The distinctiveness of Lukan pneumatology has been particularly recognised since the publication of Roger Stronstad’s *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1984).

³ Angel(s)/ archangel 24x in Luke; 23x in Acts (19x in Matthew; 5x in Mark; 3x in John; 10x in undisputed Paul; 5x in disputed Paul; 14x in Hebrews; 6x in catholic letters; 81x in Revelation).

⁴ This word is not used to imply that Luke has a developed categorisation of angels as he writes. It simply recognises that the data concerning angels that he records are evidence of his understanding of them.

⁵ Contrast the significant extent to which study of ancient Jewish angelology has been put to use in illuminating the development of New Testament Christology. See Larry Hurtado, *One God, One Lord* (London: SCM, 1988), especially ch.4.

selection of recent works (in chronological order of publication): James B. Shelton's *Mighty in Word and Deed: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts*;⁶ Robert P. Menzies' *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts*;⁷ Max Turner's *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts*;⁸ and Matthias Wenk's *Community-Forming Power: The Socio-Ethical Role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts*.⁹ Other recent work,¹⁰ including research that has concentrated on narrative criticism as a way to approach Luke's pneumatology,¹¹ has reached similar conclusions.

Little, on the other hand, has been written about Luke's portrayal of angels.¹² Joel B. Green's *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*¹³ contains a section entitled 'God, Angels, and the Holy Spirit'.¹⁴ In this, he opines that Luke's depiction of angels might be informed by intertestamental Jewish angelology.¹⁵ However, he correctly observes that "it is manifest that Luke's narrative is not itself concerned with an angelology *per se*, but presents angels only in their subordinate role as those who serve the divine project."¹⁶ Quite how subordinate that role is will be the subject of this article. At this point it is worth observing that Green's juxtaposition of 'angels' with 'the Holy Spirit' in his section title, while suggesting an awareness of functional similarities between the two, is not, however, fulfilled in the section itself, which contains no comparison other than the introductory words to the subsection on the Spirit, "Even more central to Luke's narrative theology is the Holy Spirit."¹⁷

Squires' contribution to Lukan angelology takes discussion a little further.¹⁸ He lists "the action of the Holy Spirit" and "the intervention of divine agents such as angels" next to each other in a list of the "various means" by which God executes His plan.¹⁹ In explicating this, he surveys Acts in a number of sections in each of which certain factors are discernible that enable God to fulfil His plan. These include the "Spirit, divine agents, miracles, fulfilment, necessity,"²⁰ but the Spirit and the divine agency of angels are among the most consistent of these factors. While Squires' work serves to highlight the fact that angels, not just the Holy Spirit, are instrumental in serving the outworking of God's plan, direct comparison is still lacking, and the question remains unanswered as to the respect in which the Spirit can be categorically distinguished from angels, rather than simply being regarded as an agent alongside angels (and others).

⁶ Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991.

⁷ Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994.

⁸ Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.

⁹ Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

¹⁰ E.g. J. M. Penney, *The Missionary Emphasis of Lukan Pneumatology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

¹¹ E.g. W. H. Shepherd, *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994); J. Hur, *A Dynamic Reading of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

¹² Turner is dismissive of the significance of angels in Luke-Acts (*Power*, p.423, n.56).

¹³ Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

¹⁴ Green, *Theology*, pp.37-47.

¹⁵ His claim that such an angelology was "highly developed" is, however, challenged convincingly by Hurtado, *God*, p.24.

¹⁶ Green, *Theology*, p.40.

¹⁷ Green, *Theology*, p.41.

¹⁸ John T. Squires, 'The Plan of God', pp.17-39 in I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, eds, *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

¹⁹ Squires, 'Plan', p.19.

²⁰ Squires, 'Plan', p.37.

The Promotion of Angels in Luke-Acts

The New Testament Context

The New Testament offers a varied witness concerning the importance of angels. In the letters, while some statements concerning angels are neutral as to their importance or unimportance, others are implicitly evaluative of angels. Of these, declarations demoting angels far outweigh those promoting them. Significant demotion is to be seen at: Romans 8:38 (angels cannot separate believers from divine love); 1 Corinthians 6:3 (believers will judge angels); 1 Corinthians 13:1 (loveless angelic language is useless); Galatians 1:8 (an angelic source for a false gospel does not protect it from condemnation); Colossians 2:18 (angels are not to be worshipped); Hebrews 1:4-6, 13-14, 2:5 (angels' status is incomparably lower than Christ's); 1 Peter 1:12 (the gospel is opaque to angels, however much they might wish otherwise); and 1 Peter 3:22 (angels are subject to Christ). The only clear promotion of angels occurs at: Galatians 4:14 (angelic status is rhetorically related to Christ's – this could reflect the readers' attitude rather than Paul's: cf. 2 Sam.14:17); 1 Timothy 5:21 (angels are alongside God in having oversight of a solemn charge); and 2 Peter 2:11 (angels are stronger than people).

Kittel notes this general depreciation of angels. He suggests, plausibly, that the motives for this demotion are to maintain the uniqueness of Christ among the “many ideas of messengers and messages in the surrounding world of religion” and, with particular reference to Pauline and paulinist communities, to distance Christianity from gnostic-type teaching concerning angels.²¹ Kittel fails to note, however, that this demotion of angels is not uniform throughout the New Testament. Certain documents serve, deliberately or accidentally, to promote angels.²² If this promotion is deliberate, the reasons for it are not clear.

Luke-Acts and Revelation, in particular, do not share the reserve of the epistolary material in their presentation of angels. In the case of Revelation, such is the apparent glory of the angels that the narrator is tempted to worship one (Rev.19:10; 22:8-9).²³ The extent to which Luke promotes angels is well illustrated by comparison with other synoptic material. In a piece of possible redaction of Markan material, Mark's “whoever is ashamed of me... the Son of Man will be ashamed of him, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38; cf. Matthew 16:27) becomes “whoever is ashamed of me... this one the Son of Man will be ashamed of, when he comes in the glory of him, the Father and the holy angels” (Luke 9:26). While Mark's angels simply attend the coming, Luke's share the glory. Indeed, in Luke's phrasing (which is disconcertingly ‘trinitarian’ in structure: cf. 2 Corinthians 13:13) the angels' glory might be taken to be on a par with that of the Son of Man and the Father.²⁴

Contrast can also be seen in a comparison with Matthew, which may have leant, with Luke, on ‘Q’. In a similar passage to the one just considered, Matthew contains “everyone who confesses me before people, I will confess him before my Father in heaven, but whoever denies me before people, I will deny him before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).

²¹ Gerhard Kittel, ‘ἄγγελος’, pp.74-87, Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol.I (ET Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), quotation from p.85.

²² Similar variation between enthusiastic promotion and more cautious evaluation of angels is evident in the Jewish targums. See Rimmon Kasher, ‘Angelology and the Supernal Worlds in the Aramaic Targums to the Prophets’, pp.168-191, *Journal for the Study of Judaism* XXVII.2 (May 1996).

²³ The angel's refusal to accept worship is reflected in other apocalyptic material. For discussion about whether this indicates that some Jewish groups were involved in angel worship, see Hurtado, *God*, pp.30-31.

²⁴ It is noteworthy that the Lukan version also promotes the Son of Man to share the Father's glory.

Luke writes “everyone who confesses me before people, the Son of Man will confess him before the angels of God, but whoever denies me before people will be denied before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8-9). Whatever contribution the angels are to make to the judgement of humans is unclear, but the implication is that these Lukan angels occupy an exalted status.

Angels’ Glory in Luke-Acts

Angels, who are immortal (Luke 20:36), are clearly in close relation to God. In particular, Gabriel asserts, against Zechariah’s doubts, that he stands before God (Luke 1:19; cf. Matthew 18:10). Also, the reference to “joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10; cf. 15:7 – “joy in heaven”) suggests that they are in God’s presence, for it is the finder who rejoices (Luke 15:5, 9, 22-24). In the case of the sinner who repents, the finder is understood to be God, who encourages the angels around him to rejoice with him.

Angels are not only close to God, but associated with visible glory. In Luke 2:9, the night-time angelic apparition to the shepherds is accompanied by the shining ‘glory of the Lord’. In Acts 6:15, Stephen’s face is (shining?) like an angel’s. In Acts 12:7, when an angel comes to release Peter from prison, light also shines in the cell. In Luke 24:4, the two Easter angels (cf. Luke 24:23) are in ‘dazzling’ clothes, as those of the transfigured Jesus are (Luke 9:29). This compares with the Easter angels of Mark 16:5 and John 20:12, who are more soberly dressed in ‘white’ (Matthew’s angel’s clothes are white but his appearance like lightning: Matthew 28:3).

Furthermore, angels are always good. They: act as God’s messengers (from Luke 1:11-13); are part of heaven’s ‘army’ (Luke 2:13-15); rejoice in the repentance of sinners (Luke 15:10); carry Lazarus to Abraham’s side (Luke 16:22); strengthen Jesus (Luke 22:43);²⁵ help God’s people (e.g. Acts 5:19); and strike God’s enemies (Acts 12:23). This unalloyed goodness contrasts with Romans 8:38, where angels have the potential to separate believers from God’s love, and so might be regarded as evil,²⁶ and with Revelation, where some angels fight on the side of the devil (Revelation 12:7-9; cf. Matthew 25:41).²⁷ In Luke-Acts, no relationship is depicted between angels and the devil or unclean spirits.

An angel of the Lord

Despite the reference to plural ‘angels’ in the title of this article, most references to earthly angelic apparitions in the narrative of Luke-Acts are actually to a single angel (exceptions are Luke 2:13-15; 24:4, 23; Acts 1:10). In most of these cases, the angel is introduced as ‘an angel of the Lord’ or ‘an angel of God’ (the Lord: Luke 1:11; 2:9; Acts 5:19; [7:30, received text]; 8:26; 12:7, 23; God: Acts 10:3; 27:23). This carries clear echoes of Old Testament references to ‘the angel of the LORD’. The echoes may explain why some scholars translate Lukan references as ‘*the* angel of the Lord’.²⁸ Given that some Old Testament passages do not distinguish between the angel of the LORD and the LORD himself (e.g. Genesis 16:7-13;

²⁵ The originality of this text is disputed. See later discussion.

²⁶ So J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), p.106.

²⁷ Qumran believed in an ‘angel of truth’ and an ‘angel of darkness’. See the Community Rule (1QS) III 20-24, and the commentary in Michael A. Knibb, *The Qumran Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp.95-97.

²⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts, Revised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p.173; Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p.409.

Exodus 3:2-6; Judges 6:11-14; Zechariah 3:1-4),²⁹ the possibility presents itself that Luke too fails to make such a distinction: that the angel of the Lord is as much God's divine agent as the Spirit of the Lord. This possibility seems all the stronger when it is noted that one of the Old Testament's ambiguous passages, Exodus 3:2-6, is referred to in Acts 7:30-35, with similar 'mixed references' to an angel and to the Lord. Is it the case, then, that Luke promotes at least one angel to the ultimate status of divinity?

In fact, this is clearly not the case. First, one 'angel of the Lord' in Luke-Acts introduces himself by name, and it is not God, but Gabriel (Luke 1:11, 19). Secondly, Luke always refers to a single angel as *an* angel of the Lord, rather than *the* angel of the Lord (the Greek is anarthrous), despite the choice of some translators noted earlier. This stands in distinction to the Septuagint, in which the Greek is usually anarthrous (e.g. Genesis 16:7; 22:15; Judges 13:3) but sometimes includes a definite article (e.g. Numbers 22:22; 2 Samuel 24:16; Zechariah 1:11). Thirdly, Acts 7:30-35, while including references both to an angel and to the Lord, does not confuse the two. Luke's angel is not, on this criterion, divine.

Similarities between the Spirit and Angels

It has emerged that Luke promotes angels in ways which, at times, create ambiguities about their creaturely status. While Luke's 'angel of the Lord' is not simply to be equated with the Old Testament's 'angel of the LORD', nevertheless angels do share in the glory of the Father (Luke 9:26). One particular area where Luke's portrayal of angels has common ground with his depiction of divine activity, and therefore possibly status, concerns comparison between angels and the Spirit. To this comparison discussion now turns. This section presents functional similarities, moving from the clearest to the more obscure.

An Angel, the Spirit, and Philip (Acts 8:26-39)

This passage represents the most striking proximity of an angel's role to that of the Spirit. An angel of the Lord tells Philip to go south (or at noon;³⁰ Acts 8:26) and as a consequence he meets an Ethiopian official. The Spirit then tells Philip to approach the man (Acts 8:29), and as a result Philip is able to witness to Christ. There is apparently no functional difference here between the voice of the angel and the voice of the Spirit. Each is integral to a purpose which Lukan pneumatologists have long, and rightly, ascribed to the Lukan Spirit. Indeed, in isolation this passage might well suggest that the Spirit *was* the angel. Such is Bruce's conclusion, which is unhelpfully reinforced by Bruce's translation of Acts 8:26 as "*the* angel of the Lord" (see earlier discussion). He claims that reference to the angel is "a vivid way of denoting Philip's divine guidance."³¹ While Bruce tentatively identifies the angel with God, Kistemaker is ambivalent: "In the case of Philip, Luke reveals that this angel is actually the Spirit of the Lord (vv.29, 39). Philip is in the service of the Lord, whose Spirit communicates to him through an angel."³² Neither Bruce's claim nor Kistemaker's equivocation is convincing, however. Whatever impression this passage might offer in isolation, it seems more reasonable to assume that Luke's view of angels on the one hand

²⁹ See discussion in D. N. Freedman and B. E. Willoughby, 'מַלְאָכִים mal'āk', pp.308-325, G. Johannes Botterwick *et al*, eds, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol.VIII (ET Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp.319-321.

³⁰ So F. Scott Spencer, *Journeying Through Acts* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), p.100.

³¹ Bruce, *Book*, p.174; cf. p.140 n.50. Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (ET Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p.29, and Turner, *Power*, p.423, n.56, agree that no distinction is drawn.

³² Simon J. Kistemaker, *Acts*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), p.310.

and the Spirit on the other are constant, and that therefore his depiction elsewhere might disperse the ambiguity suggested in Acts 8.³³

Before leaving this passage, it is noteworthy that textual uncertainties regarding it possibly attest to a desire on the part of Acts' early copyists to remove the ambiguity between angel and Spirit caused by Acts 8:26, 29. While the best attested texts of Acts 8:39 declare that the Holy Spirit removed Philip from the scene, the Western text reads "the Holy Spirit fell upon the eunuch, but the angel of the Lord caught Philip up."³⁴ Among suggestions that this longer reading serves to clarify that the Ethiopian receives the Spirit, and speculation that it protects against a gnostic understanding,³⁵ the possibility also lies that is intended to clarify that the angel is *not* the Spirit.

An Angel, the Spirit, Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:3-23)

As in the case of Philip's evangelistic enterprises, Peter's mission to Gentiles is guided not only by the Spirit, but also by an angel. Peter and Cornelius are drawn together by the intervention of both. In particular, while Cornelius is told about Peter by an angel (Acts 10:5), Peter is told about Cornelius' friends by the Spirit (Acts 10:19). Thus, again, an angel plays a pivotal part in guiding the early Christian mission, a part usually understood to belong, in Luke's mind, primarily to the Spirit.

It might be assumed that the distinction in pairings, if not in roles (the angel spoke to Cornelius; the Spirit spoke to Peter) indicates a distinct difference, in Luke's mind, between the activity of angels and the Spirit: the Spirit is given to believers; Peter is one but Cornelius is not (yet); thus Peter is entitled to the Spirit's intervention, while Cornelius must, for the time being, 'make do' with an angel. However, such an assumption is shown to be false, both from this passage itself, and from others under discussion in this article. In the case of this passage, Cornelius sees the angel by way of a vision (Acts 10:3). Visions are precisely one of the ways that the newly outpoured Spirit would communicate with 'all flesh' (Acts 2:17). So Cornelius' awareness of the angel seems, in turn, to be mediated to him by the Spirit, even if he has not yet received the 'gift' of the Spirit promised at Acts 2:38 and recorded, in his case, at Acts 10:44.³⁶ Moving to other relevant passages, the guidance of an angel and the Spirit in Philip's case (Acts 8; see discussion above) indicates that even for those who are recognisably Spirit-filled (Acts 6:3-5), angelic intervention has a place.

An Angel, the Spirit, and Paul

In the case of Paul's mission, angelic intervention is not as visible as it is in Peter's or Philip's. While Paul is, like them, guided by the Spirit in his mission (Acts 13:1-4; 16:6-10; etc.), no record is offered of an angel's guidance or involvement. When the prison doors open to Paul, no angelic agency is mentioned (Acts 16:26; cf. 5:19). However, an angel is involved in reassurance. He tells Paul not to be afraid: he will survive storm and shipwreck (Acts 27:23-24). This bears significant similarities to Paul's vision in Corinth, in which the Lord tells him not to be afraid, for he will not be harmed (Acts 18:9-10; cf. 23:11). Here the

³³ Turner's suggestion that the reference to an angel is probably traditional, not Lukan, (*Power*, p.423, n.56) is unhelpful. Luke seems perfectly able to redact his sources to make them contribute to his purposes coherently.

³⁴ Menzies regards the Western text as original, though for tendentious reasons (*Empowered*, p.113). Most (e.g. Bruce, *Book*, p.178; Conzelmann, *Acts*, p.69) are agreed that it is not.

³⁵ Bruce, *Book*, p.178 and Conzelmann, *Acts*, p.69 respectively.

³⁶ For the possibility of the Spirit's action in someone prior to his/her reception of the 'gift of the Spirit', see my 'The Prior Work of the Spirit in the Lukan Portrayal', *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 5-6 (2001), pp.107-114.

Holy Spirit is not mentioned explicitly, but as already discussed, visions are programmatically related to the outpoured Spirit at the outset (Acts 2:17). It is the Spirit who is to be understood as conveying God's words to Paul in Corinth, just as it is an angel who conveys divine words to Paul on the ship. Thus, less directly than in the instances above, an angel's role in Paul's life is depicted as equivalent to that of the Spirit.

An Angel, the Spirit, and Jesus

As the discussion turns from Jesus' followers to Jesus himself, the claim for any similarity between the role of angels and that of the Spirit must become tentative, for the evidence is tenuous. As in the case of Paul, angelic intervention occurs not to guide the mission, but to strengthen and reassure in circumstances of hardship or pressure. Luke 22:43 records the strengthening appearance of an angel to Jesus on the Mount of Olives, when Jesus is prayerfully facing the dread of the cup of suffering He must drink at the end of His earthly ministry.³⁷

This may bear some resemblance to the Lukan Spirit's ministry to Jesus in His wilderness temptations at the start of His ministry, as is suggested by comparison with the record in Mark's gospel. Assuming that Luke uses Mark as a source, he follows him in stating that the Spirit is the cause of Jesus' presence in the wilderness (Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1). However, by altering both the verb and the preposition involved in this declaration, Luke introduces a potentially important distinction: in Mark, the Spirit *thrusts* Jesus *into* the desert; in Luke, the Spirit *leads* Jesus *in* the desert. Mark's implication may be that the Spirit does not accompany Jesus there, despite the Spirit's arrival on Jesus at Mark 1:10. Indeed, such divine succour as Jesus receives in the midst of His temptations is provided by angels (Mark 1:13). Luke's implication, on the other hand, is that the Spirit accompanies Jesus, perhaps to aid Him withstand the tests.³⁸ Significantly in this regard, the angels are absent from Luke's account (cf. Matthew 4:11), offering further indirect evidence that Jesus' help is coming by way of the Spirit.

Comparison with Luke 22:43 can now be offered: on the Mount of Olives, an angel supports Jesus in His time of need; in the wilderness, the Spirit seems to. Equivalence of function is perhaps implied.

Differences between the Spirit and Angels

The evidence reviewed above suggests that Luke promotes angels to be on a functional par, at least in some respects, to the Spirit. This obviously raises questions about the degree of distinction, if any, that he also draws. If no distinctions were to be found, then Lukan pneumatology and angelology would need to fundamentally rethought. However, some important distinctions do emerge, both in terms of function and in terms of status.

Angels, the Spirit, and Miracles

There is superficial resemblance between the ministries of angels and the Spirit with regard to miracles: both perform them. However, they do so in quite different ways. Angelic miracles, which are rare, are recorded as being performed by the angel himself (Luke 1:20-22; Acts 5:19; possibly 12:9-10, 23). Angels *never enable people to perform them*. The Spirit, on the other hand, typically empowers people to perform miracles (e.g. Acts 10:38;

³⁷ Commentators are uncertain about the originality of 22:43-44. See the balanced discussions of John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53* (Dallas: Word, 1993), pp.1080-1081, 1084 (who argues that it is a later addition) and I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1978), pp.831-832 (who argues that it is original).

³⁸ For affirming discussion of this possibility, see Wenk, *Power*, pp.198-199.

13:9-11).³⁹ The only miracles which Luke regards as performed by the Spirit directly are the conception of Jesus and the translation of Philip (Luke 1:35; Acts 8:39).

This distinction is implicitly more than one of mere function. It suggests that the Spirit and angels are not equivalent as intermediaries between God and humanity. The agency of an angel creates a three-step procession: the God who sends; the angel who performs; and the person who benefits. The agency of the Spirit, however, creates a four-fold procession: the God who sends; the Spirit who enables; the person who performs; and the person who benefits. This begins to resolve some of the ambiguity suggested earlier about the status of angels: an angel who performs miracles is to be more closely associated a person who performs them than with the Spirit who enables them.

Angels, the Spirit, and Divine Speech

Angels characteristically speak, while the Spirit characteristically enables people to speak. In fact, angels hardly ever seem to be silent when they appear to people.⁴⁰ They act as God's mouthpiece, bringing God's message. There is no record of angels directly enabling human speech, either by giving precise words to say or by granting the boldness to overcome inhibitions, although they do occasionally offer more general guidance concerning future speech (Acts 5:20; 10:5, 22).

In the case of the Spirit, the situation is more complex. As discussed above, the Spirit does sometimes speak to people (Acts 8:29; 10:19; 13:2;⁴¹ possibly 16:7). Characteristically, though, the infilling of the Spirit enables people themselves to become God's mouthpieces, bringing God's message (Luke 1:15-17, 41-42, 67; 2:27-28; 4:18; 10:21; 12:12; Acts 1:8; 2:4, 17; 4:8, 31; 6:10; 10:44-46; 13:9; 18:25;⁴² 19:6). These Spirit-filled people, then, rather than the Spirit himself, become functionally equivalent to the angels as God's messengers on earth. In terms of status, angels who bring God's speech appear to have a subservient position to the Spirit who enables God's speech.

Angels, the Spirit, and Divine Apparition

Angels are often visible (whether in vision or 'physically' is not always clear to the onlookers: Acts 12:9). The Spirit only is twice (Luke 3:22; Acts 2:3).⁴³ He is assumed to be generally invisible. Also, while angels are sometimes thereby the objects of visions (e.g. Luke 24:23; Acts 10:3), the Spirit never is: He is the grantor of visions (Acts 2:17). This places the Spirit and angels in a subject-object relationship with one another, rather than as direct equivalents. The Spirit is the subject, regarded as acting upon angels, in that a Spirit-inspired vision might involve an angel. Angels are never presented by Luke as subjects acting upon the Spirit.⁴⁴ Also, though the Spirit is active as a character, while God is 'off-

³⁹ Menzies' thesis that the Lukan Spirit of Prophecy, like the intertestamental one, is not directly involved in miracles (*Empowered*, e.g. pp.102, 227) does not stand, as has been ably demonstrated by Turner (*Power*, e.g. pp.138, 224-225, 256-264).

⁴⁰ There are remarkably few records of an angel's appearance on earth in the narrative of Luke-Acts that do not involve a record of that angel's words (Luke 22:43; Acts 12:23).

⁴¹ However, 13:2 might best be regarded as a reference to prophecy, rather than as a direct (inner?) voice to the whole group (so Bruce, *Book*, p.245; Conzelmann, *Acts*, p.99; Shepherd, *Function*, p.92).

⁴² 18:25 is open to a number of plausible translations, which may or may not attribute Apollos' fervour to the Holy Spirit. See brief discussion in Fitzmyer, *Acts*, pp.638-639.

⁴³ Shepherd refers to the 'opacity' of these visible aspects as means to knowing the Spirit as a character in Luke's narrative (*Function*, p.253); cf. Hur, *Reading*, pp.129-130.

⁴⁴ The only possible occurrence of such a concept in the New Testament is at Revelation 17:3.

stage’,⁴⁵ His general invisibility nevertheless suggests that He is on the divine side of the duality between visible characters in the drama of Luke-Acts who fulfil God’s plan on earth, and the invisible heavenly instigator of that fulfilment.

Angels, the Spirit, and Human Inspiration

It seems likely that Luke intends to convey the idea that those who are visited by angels and thereby guided, reassured and informed, are ‘inspired’ as a result. The visitation itself is at least sometimes numinous enough to inspire fear or amazement (Luke 1:12, 29-30; 24:5; Acts 7:30; 10:4). However, when discussion turns to the Spirit, it is of course possible to use the word ‘inspiration’ in a far more technical sense. The Spirit is sent by God to be in, or upon, people (Luke 1:15, 41, 67; 2:25; 4:18; Acts 1:8; 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 9:17; 10:44; 11:24; 19:6).

The only possible equivalents to this indwelling in Luke-Acts have to do with the realm of evil. Satan enters people (Judas – Luke 22:3; Ananias – Acts 5:3); demons are ‘in’ people (e.g. Luke 4:33-36). However, there is no internal evidence that Luke regards Satan or demons as part of the angelic realm. With these possible exceptions, the picture is consistent: angels are only ever external to people, whereas the Spirit is available to reside and work within. This would not have any direct implications concerning the status of angels, were it not for the widespread availability of the Spirit to be thus within people (Acts 2:17, 38-39). The universality of this availability implies omnipresence – a characteristic never ascribed to angels.

Angels, the Spirit, and the Christ

Terminologically, angels are related to God in a way that superficially mirrors the Spirit’s relation to God (‘angel of the Lord’; ‘Spirit of the Lord’; ‘holy angel’; ‘Holy Spirit’). When, however, their relation to the risen Christ is observed, no similarity is to be found. The coming one promised by John the Baptist is to be one who himself grants the Spirit (Luke 3:16). Initially, when he comes, Jesus has a relationship with the Spirit in which he is the recipient of the Spirit’s involvement and help (Luke 1:35; 3:22; 4:18; Acts 1:2; 10:38). He grants power (Luke 9:1), but not the Spirit. After the ascension, however, a remarkable change in relationship occurs. Now, ascended to the Father’s right hand, Jesus is given the Spirit by the Father *to grant* (Acts 2:33). Thereafter, the Spirit can rightly be called the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7), for not only can the visions he grants convey the presence of Jesus to their recipients (Acts 7:55), but, more generally, his whole ministry to the church offers them continuing experience of Christ’s presence.⁴⁶

The comparison with angels is simple and clear. As Conzelmann observes, angels in Luke-Acts are never ‘the angel of Christ’.⁴⁷ Some association (of glory) between the Son of Man and angels has already been noted (Luke 9:26). However, there is no sense at all that angels appearing to people are conveying the presence of Christ. In this respect, their contribution to the church’s life is distinctly less significant than that of the Spirit. As Turner notes, “Luke does not imagine any believer being sustained in ‘salvation’ by a succession of angelophanies.”⁴⁸

Conclusion

⁴⁵ See discussion by Shepherd of the Spirit as ‘character’ and ‘actor’ (*Function*, pp.90-98).

⁴⁶ See Turner’s discussion in *Power*, ch.13.

⁴⁷ Conzelmann, *Acts*, p.41.

⁴⁸ Turner, *Power*, p.423, n.56.

Summary

It has emerged in the course of this discussion that Luke promotes angels in ways that are distinct (though not unique) within the New Testament corpus. His references to them are profuse, and their appearances in his narrative occur at pivotal moments. Their impact, through the news they bring and the miracles they perform, is presented as not merely tangential to the outworking of God's plan, but vital to its success.

In particular, a remarkable similarity of function between angels and the Spirit in Luke-Acts has been surveyed. Both are involved in enabling, guiding, strengthening and reassuring the mission of the earliest church. In both cases, this involves doing God's works and speaking God's words, thereby acting as God's agents. The similarity is so close at times that certain passages, heard alone, might suggest confusion of identity, or at least status, between the Spirit and angels.

However, when the differences are surveyed, indications emerge of the distinction in status and identity that Luke maintains between the two. While the Spirit and angels both stand as objects of God's activity (especially sending), the Spirit stands always as subject, and never as object, in relation to angels themselves. Furthermore, His relationships with people are distinct from those which angels have in ways which indicate: His potency, for He enables people to speak and act for God; His omnipresence, for He is available to all; and His relationship to Christ, whose presence He conveys.

Implications for Lukan and Pauline Studies

Luke is obviously indebted to the Old Testament (and in particular the Septuagint). However, his world-view also bears certain resemblances to the intervening Judaism attested to by well-known pseudepigraphic literature. His view of the Spirit, of course, contains crucial differences, for it has been refracted through the lens of the Christ-event and earliest Christianity's interpretation of that event. His view of angels, however, has changed less. Jewish pseudepigraphic literature is capable of unrestrained promotion of angels. They: are holy (1 Enoch 20:1; 27:2); surround God (1 Enoch 60:2; cf. Test. Jud. 25:2; Test. Levi 18:5); perform miracles (1 Enoch 66); guide souls (Test. Ben. 6:1); and perhaps receive prayers (1 Enoch 99:3).⁴⁹ Luke is more restrained in his presentation. Notably, in language that is reminiscent of 1 Enoch 99:3, human prayers now stand as a memorial, not before angels, but before God (Ac.10:4). However, he is not as restrained as Paul, whose letters generally display a cautious attitude towards angels (see discussion above).

In seeking an explanation as to why the Pauline departure from the pseudepigraphic picture is greater than the Lukan one, an answer cannot be found in chronology, for Luke-Acts was undoubtedly written later than the undisputed Pauline literature, and so represents a reversal of the Pauline tendency. It seems more likely that Luke's enthusiasm for angels and Paul's caution concerning them are part of a wider enthusiasm or caution on the part of the two authors, which may in turn indicate as much about their personality as their theology. Other examples of this difference of attitude can be discerned in their presentation of spiritual manifestations, such as the public use of tongues speech (Ac.10:46-47; 1 Cor.14:19) and visionary trances (Ac.10:10-20; 2 Cor.12:4), and in their approach to characters such as Peter, who for Luke is clearly one of the great heroes of the faith (Ac.2:43; 3:12; 4:19, 33;

⁴⁹ Study of Jewish beliefs in divine intermediaries has been an important contributor to providing a background for New Testament Christology. See Hurtado, *God*.

5:9, 15, etc.) but to whom Paul offers somewhat reluctant recognition (Gal.2:9), but ready criticism (Gal.2:11).

Implications for contemporary Christian practice

It is not surprising that Pentecostal and charismatic churches evidence an interest in angels, given their appetite for ‘supernatural’ phenomena.⁵⁰ If such churches are to have an attitude to angels that is informed by Luke’s, the results will be both positive and negative. Negatively, Luke does not in the final analysis allow angels to usurp the Spirit’s unique place. While Luke’s characters do reply when addressed by angels, he makes no suggestion that there is value in offering petitionary prayers to angels.⁵¹ Further, he gives no room for the replacement of the Spirit by angels which occurs in the Celestial Church of Christ.⁵² Also, Luke’s presentation is at variance with the experience of Alex Buchanan, who reports seeing a vision of angels in which they, alongside the Trinity, say “Never be afraid because we are with you, and we are for you.”⁵³ Luke’s account certainly offers a precedent for Buchanan’s vision, and for angels to be seen therein. However, Christians in Acts are not comforted by the abiding presence of angels, but by the abiding presence of the Spirit of Christ.

Positively, however, some churches today may need to balance a natural caution about angels, created by their world-view and perhaps supported by Pauline reticence, with a recognition of their value in the spread of the earliest church, and the potential value of their activities in the life and mission of the church today. Whether one should actively seek this involvement is not a question to which Luke’s narratives offer any answer, but Luke supports the notion that one is wise to welcome its occurrence.

⁵⁰ Evidence of such an interest includes popular books on the subject, e.g.: Charles and Frances Hunter, *Angels on Assignment* (Kingswood: Hunter Books, 1979); David Lamb, *Angels and Demons* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1999); Trevor Newport, *Angels, Demons and Spiritual Warfare* (Chichester: New Wine Press, 1997); Ayo Omideyi, *Angels of the Lord* (London: Sower, 1996). This output is not without its critics. Robert A. Geulich, ‘Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti’ (*Pneuma* 13.1 [Spring 1991], pp.33-64) is unimpressed not just by Peretti’s demonology but by his angelology (cf. Frank Peretti, *This Present Darkness* [Westchester: Crossway, 1986]).

⁵¹ Cf. “The Church teaches us to pray to the angels.” (Pie-Raymond Régamey, *What is an Angel?* [London: Burns & Oates, 1960], p.7).

⁵² “Instead of the Holy Spirit, as is the case for most Western pentecostal groups, the CCC views the activity of angels (the effects of their presence) as evidence of sanctification, divine favor, and spiritual significance.” Of prophecy, “Here, too, angels and not, strictly speaking, the Holy Spirit are responsible for this spiritual gift.” (J. D. Carter, ‘Celestial Church of Christ’, pp.467-472, Stanley M. Burgess, ed., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002], p.468).

⁵³ Alex Buchanan, *Heaven and Hell* (Tonbridge: Sovereign World, 1995), p.130.