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The Babel paradox

Michel Machado

University of South Florida

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The Babel Paradox

by

Michel Machado

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Major Professor: James F. Strange, Ph.D.
Cass Fisher, Ph.D.
Paul Schneider, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the book of Acts is still not well understood. Various interpretations have been offered in order to make sense of the narrative and its author's intention. What is the point of Luke's second book in portraying the evangelization of the Roman Empire as a rabid confrontation between Jewish followers of Jesus and other Jewish people?

This matter calls for an examination of the relationship between the mother religion and the Jesus movement as it expands into a universal religion. Luke portrays the Jesus movement as the focus of divine favor, in contradistinction to the Jewish nation which is presented as opposing the plan of God. Christians respond to persecution by declaring the opponents guilty of opposition to the very work of the Holy Spirit. This portrait of a troubled relationship has led to many confusing or misguided interpretations of the text. What are the implications of the apparent break of continuity between the Jesus movement and the Jewish people? Does the book of Acts give to Israel a place in the divine plan, or is this work an anti-Semitic polemic?

This question is so complex that three schools of thought have arisen to attempt to reconcile the conflicting themes. These scholars recognize the friction between Christians and Jews, but debate the significance of the missing explicit repudiation of Israel. Two of these schools view God as continuing to work through the people of

Israel, while the third proposes that God has repudiated Israel as the elect nation, replacing her with the Christian Church. This thesis proposes that there has been inadequate attention to the possibility that the narrative is imbedded with neglected *Jewish* themes, like Pentecost and the gift of Languages (Tongues). Several texts in the Hebrew Scriptures provide indications that Languages have specific implications to the Covenant with Israel, and her place in the plan of God. A deeper study of a first century understanding of these themes will produce substantial, new light on all of these questions.

The Babel Paradox

The significance of the relationship between Jewish themes and the *Hellenization* process of the Jesus faction – as it changed character from a sect of Judaism to an independent, predominantly gentile movement – has remained an unresolved issue for scholars seeking to understand the purpose and structure of the New Testament book of Acts. In 1966, W. C. van Unnik foresaw that the process of the Hellenization of Christianity was inseparably linked to any study of the combined Luke-Acts narrative (21). This process is most obvious in the book of Acts, and it entails a paradoxical, multi-pronged narrative strategy. An inadequate awareness of this strategy can result in confusion about the author's goal and approach. One can view Acts as the history of the Christian movement, and yet fail to see that while it contains histories, it is not written as 'history' as understood today (Pervo, Profit 8; Witherington 3; Fitzmyer, Luke 15,172). Some of the acts of some apostles are included, and yet although Peter's career and those of other apostles are included, the attention of the reader, as the book progresses, shifts toward an apology for the key figure of Paul and his mission to the Gentiles. Ironically, a pervasive Jewish background is also undeniable, and Jewish themes are used throughout. However, those are often employed simply for the purpose of proving the concept of the 'election' of the Gentiles. And yet an intriguing confirmation of this phenomenon that we will call the *Babel paradox* appears in one of the most neglected *Jewish* themes in

Acts and in New Testament studies – the Jerusalem Pentecost – and its effusion of foreign languages (Acts 2.1-38).

In many places, the author of the book of Acts appears to utilize the motif of the Pentecost's foreign languages as an initial sign of the covenantal rupture of the Jesus movement from Second Temple Judaism, most likely by his focusing on the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy. Subsequent Pentecost-like outpourings, such as the outpouring of the Spirit in Caesarea and at Ephesus, are linked with narratives of this discontinuity, as characterized by an ever-increasing confrontation with Jewish authorities and crowds. These rather negative narratives serve as the counterpoint of the Isaianic vision of the ingathering of the exiles and of the, *Gentiles* (Pao 114, 242). These events – in effect, three Pentecosts – act as historical, geographical and symbolic transitions for a 'heavenly and necessary' (to use Mark Reasoner's apt concept), and providentially guided progression from a Jewish sect to a completely autonomous, global Christianity; thus fulfilling the same Isaianic vision of the ingathering of the Gentiles (636).

In the ongoing scholarly debate concerning the question of continuity or discontinuity of the Jesus movement within Second Temple Judaism, this thesis aims to bring a unique contribution to the latter side of the debate. It proposes that this framework of discontinuity serves as a *literary scheme* that combines and juxtaposes the Deuteronomistic theme of curses and blessings with the Isaianic theme of the ingathering of the Gentiles. This framework not only provides a plausible structure and purpose for the book of Acts, but also elucidates significant blocks of material throughout the narrative which, until now, have remained conundrums – that is, without satisfying a

coherent, contextual explanation within any existing or proposed structure or plan of the book of Acts. Significant events can all now be understood as taking their proper places within a coherent narrative and a well established structure. These include: the election of Matthias as the twelfth apostle, the gift of Languages in the three Pentecosts, the triadic call of Paul for the shift of gospel proclamation towards the Gentiles, and the enigmatic end of the book of Acts. Furthermore, this thesis prefers to use the term ‘Languages’ as a translation of *glossais*, with the intention to steer clear of the term ‘Tongues’ a term that has taken on something of an iconic stature in modern usage.

The Babel Paradox

Why is the book of Acts still being misread today? What are the causes of the neglect of the Jewish hermeneutical clues for the book of Acts – especially the covenantal and judicial significance of the languages of Pentecost? Several scholars have addressed this subject, including Charette, Johanson, Menoud, Robertson and Sweet; however their impact has been limited. This is a complex issue, and various factors contribute to this situation. All are not directly related to the book of Acts, nonetheless they are relevant to a near-universal misapplication of the evidence. These factors can be divided into theological and cultural issues.

Theology

Christians traditionally read Acts mainly in an anachronistic manner, and from their own denominational standpoint. Their interpretation sees the combined book narrative of Luke-Acts as written by Christian for Christians, and stresses primarily a

salvation history, and the inclusion of the Gentiles into the fold of Christianity. This one-sided view overlooks the built-in Jewish matrix and its own negative perspective, while overemphasizing positively the significance of the Gentiles' inclusion into the 'New Covenant' community. It fails to see that their positive integration within the community of faith had a negative converse effect. The book of Acts, following the Hebrew Scriptures' frequent use of the incomprehensibility of foreign languages as tacit warnings of exile for Israel, ultimately records the estrangement of the new Judeo-Gentile religion from the national institutions of Second Temple Judaism.

It is curious that scholars have long been aware of a possible connection between the *speaking in unknown language (s)* and *divine judgment*, but have generally failed to exploit a Jewish perspective of this theme. Conzelmann, for example, observes that storm and fire are associated with judgment, but he does not identify a linkage to the use of languages (13). Haenchen notes that Lake associates Isaiah 28.11 with languages, but only to emphasize the term *heteros* (Foakes-Jackson .v. 5.115; Haenchen 168, note 4). Since consideration of the Jewish substratum of the text has not been included in the hermeneutical foundations of prior interpretative effort, the relation of *judgment* to *languages* has been lost. As a consequence, the book of Acts is only understood as a discourse fitting a modern understanding, which construes the Pentecost event only in terms of the traditional birth of what is called the Church. A good example is F.F. Bruce, who, in his otherwise distinguished book, ascribes the heading, *The Birth of the Church*, to his discussion of Acts 1.1-5.42 (28). This interpretation so dominates western Christian discourse that it completely obscures any other possible reading of what Pentecost and languages could signify for the author of the book of Acts, or his original

readership. A consequence of this hermeneutical choice is that in the nineteenth century some individual Christians, and later, entire denominations, began to view the gift of Languages as foundational in nature, and have constructed a series of doctrines on this so-called foundation that the writers of Scriptures may never have intended.

The proponents of this view, omitting the Jewish stratum from the text of Acts itself, compound the confusion by turning uniquely to the first epistle to the Corinthians, in order to make sense of the gift of Languages. The Christian paradigm of the book of Acts seemingly requires an understanding of the term glossais to mean ‘gift of Tongues’ rather than ‘languages’, and that view is then supported by viewing the book of First Corinthians from an anachronistic perspective. This thesis will demonstrate that there are also several Jewish elements of the context of First Corinthians which need to be considered. Furthermore, contrary to a modern, common opinion, it can be shown that Paul’s discussion in chapters twelve to fourteen of First Corinthians does not commend the practice of speaking in ‘a language’ or ‘languages’ by his Corinthian converts. He sees their practice as leading to confusion, and is destructive to the unity and order in their assembly. While he does not prohibit its continued use – the real gift was potentially operative in their assembly – he provides corrective instructions to minimize the damage done to their community. To accomplish this, Paul provides constructive counterpoints: he emphasizes the primacy of prophecy, and also points out the often-missed definition and intent of languages – a Jewish explanation of the *judicial* nature of the gift of Languages – to his Corinthian flock.

The prevailing interpretation of Acts and First Corinthians from a specifically Christian viewpoint leads to some significant theological consequences. The Pentecostal denominations' misinterpretation of Paul's intention has become widespread, and the opinion resulting from it – the supposed eligibility, and even the supposed 'normative' use, of speaking in 'Tongues' – has taken almost that of an iconic stature. Entire Christian denominations have been established based on this interpretation: taking what was intended as a pastoral, concessionary counsel to be a doctrinal prescription. The logic of this understanding leads believers in Pentecostal-type churches to adopt the regular, existential practice of *self-edification* through the gift of speaking in 'Tongues'. Believers, as well as the general public, are lured into believing that what could have been a misinformed practice of the Corinthian assembly then is today regarded as the only proof of an existential reality of 'being in the Spirit' and therefore, being the 'normative' use of the gift of Languages.

The dominance of this outlook – in certain quarters – and its theological implications seem to be self-evident. Jack Hayford's book, *The Beauty of Spiritual Language*, offers a remarkable description of a Pentecostal understanding of the gift that encourages a reader to agree with his point of view. Taking a broader viewpoint that is more in keeping with the historical situation and context of the passages relating to languages, however, may lead to a more exact and divergent conclusion.

Three other minor points have also been misunderstood, as a consequence of this shift concerning the 'Birth of the Church'. The first is the neglect of the first post-resurrection appearance in the gospel of John (20.19-23). According to John, the apostles

and others received the Holy Spirit personally from the resurrected one. The existence of this tradition opens other alternative interpretations to the Luke-Acts day of Pentecost, rather than being necessarily limited exclusively to the 'Birth of the Church.'

The second is that much confusion exists concerning John the Baptist's expression "baptism of the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt. 3:11, Mark 1:2-8, cf. Zech. 12:10). It has become common in the Pentecostal and Charismatic doctrinal approach to employ this expression as a call for purification and the renewing of believers. The context of John's phrase is definitively forgotten. The judicial meaning and the intended recipients of the saying of John have largely disappeared, in order to give place to the individualistic self-edification and purification of the Pentecostal believers.

Ecclesiastical tradition has disassociated the baptism of John from the baptism of Jesus. The Magisterial Reformation continued the Roman Catholic practice of infant baptism, and consequently detached Jesus' baptism from John's requirement of repentance preceding that rite. This 'Christian baptism' given to infants was of course devoid of this repentance feature, and is more applicable to the promotion of ecclesiastical and national unity in a 'Christian State'. This dichotomy has not only thrown the episode of the Ephesians Pentecost into a morass of contradiction, shifting interest mostly toward a re-baptism of John's disciples, but ignores completely the Jewish context of this passage, and minimizes its significance as the third and final Pentecost event of the book of Acts (19.1-7).

Culture

The book of Acts presents a fiercely antagonistic view towards Second Temple Judaism, but it was not intended to advocate violence against the Jews then, nor against the Judaism of today. It is through an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances that Acts became an unlikely predecessor to contemporary European anti-Semitism. Luke could not have imagined that the Pauline movement he documented would eventually be transformed into an imperial religion, nor become a dominant force of western civilization. The biblical issues and their historical context were, as this thesis contends, already forgotten soon after the close of the apostolic period. The records of this era (Acts specifically, and the Christian Scriptures generally) were then utterly misinterpreted and misapplied within a different context, that came into being even before the time the Jesus movement in the West had metamorphosed under the Byzantine Emperors (Tiede qtd. in Tyson Luke-Acts 22).

Acts touches on events that are painful facts of religious history. Following the fall of the Temple, there were various groups, including Pauline Christianity and the Matthean community, and the remnant of Pharisaic Judaism, struggling to rebuild the Jewish identity and recapture their heritage (Overman, 51). The Mattheans disappear shortly thereafter, and the two remaining factions were left to compete for legitimacy as the heir to Second Temple Judaism. Each claimed Abraham's inheritance. Acts is a work of the late first century and serves the function of a Pauline letter of divorce (Jer 3.8, cf. Gal 4.21-31, Heb 8.1-13). As such, it is not presented in a pleasing academic manner, but wallows in the warp and woof of religious strife. Pauline Christians

separated from Second Temple Judaism and used covenantal themes of estrangement and rejection to justify their flight from the mother faith's matrix, and the acceptance of Gentiles into their ranks. The divorce was not settled peacefully, and its bitter effects are still felt in our culture today, even though it is no longer clearly recognized or well understood. The new Judaism came to be politically dominated by the new, imperial, state Christianity that arose from the Pauline Gentile communities. The words and concepts that had served for the Pauline party as a certificate of divorce were transformed in the hands of a church state into a warrant of persecution and ostracism.

Academic Research

Modern scholarship, if it has not yet completely mapped the specific and gradual withdrawal of Christians from Second Temple Judaism as found in Luke-Acts, is nonetheless aware of a pervasive ambiguity concerning the consequences of the acceptance of Gentiles into the fold of the Pauline churches. Paul's words and activities, particularly in Acts, elicit uncertainty about the problem of Gentile acceptance, and thus uncertainty of the status of continuity of the Jesus movement within the Second Temple Judaism and its Covenant.

Among the numerous interpretative schemes offered to solve this problem, the subject of the Gentile Mission, is a common element several scholars have used as their basis for a proposed structure. Their enquiry is directed at the tension between two recurrent themes of the narrative. The motifs of the Gentiles' acceptance of Jesus as Savior, and that of the conflict and rejection of Jesus and his apostles by the *traditionalists*, seem to be intentionally coupled together in Acts. The term traditionalist

(s) is used to emphasis that we have the record of an intramural debate among Jewish co-religionists it applies equally to adherent of Second Temple Judaism or Christian believers who sought to retain Jewish culture/religious practice In the second part of Acts, covering the career of the apostle Paul, the author links these two themes and portrays the traditionalists consistently as jealous and aggressively opposed to the successes experienced whenever the gospel is preached to the Gentiles (Chapters 13-28). The animosity between the evangelists and the traditionalists is depicted as growing throughout the careers of Peter and Paul, finally reaching the point where reconciliation becomes seemingly impossible. This militant confrontation between those reaching out to the Gentiles and those seeking to keep the faith purely Jewish, seems to be a major conflict within the narrative. The author informs the reader that this animosity even spills over into the Christian camp, where Christians of Jewish birth hold contentious, reticent sentiments towards Gentiles and their ethnicity. These Judaic Christians resist acceptance of Gentile believers, and they advocate a faith more in keeping with the Law and Jewish exclusiveness (Acts 6.1; 10.45-48; 11.2-3, 17-18; 15.1-2, 5-7; 10; 20.29-30; cf. 21. 20-26).

Against this backdrop of hostility and distrust, at least three times the apostle Paul utters a stern declaration, “We now turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13.46-48, 51; 18.6; 28.25-28). The author emphasizes these declarations by making them the default response to situations filled with confusion, antagonism, or hatred between Paul and his audience. The author depicts Paul as ‘haranguing’ his opponents on these three occasions and even makes the third declaration the climatic conclusion of the book of Acts.

Survey of Research

This conflict's prominent place has intrigued scholars who have tried to resolve what the author's intent was in introducing the acceptance of Gentiles and Paul's three declarations of turning away from a Jewish-oriented ministry. Two significant sources are used in this survey to understand this problem. Joseph Tyson has assembled and published eight critical and divergent perspectives in *Luke-Acts and the Jewish People*. His work centers on the problem of the Gentile mission and the relationship of Christians with Jews as possible clues to explain the book's purpose. Also, this survey largely follows Alan Powell's summary of all major interpretations of this problem and uses his classification of three main schools of thoughts: the rejection, the supplement, and the complement theories (68-72).

The rejection theory asserts that the Gentile Mission replaces the mission to Jews. Jack Sanders is the epitome of the rejectionist view. Retorting to Tannehill's new 'tragic understanding' of the work of Luke that views the Jews as victims, he takes the opposite view and concludes his essay, "the tragedy of the Gospel is the execution of the last Great Prophet, who journey through the page of the Gospel toward his inescapable fate." The Jews' are the villains, not the victims (qtd. in Tyson *Luke-Acts* 75). A more nuanced perspective is offered by Michael Cook. His essay seizes upon the subtleties of Luke's intention to argue that "the Lucan Paul's repeated resumptions of overtures to the Jews now appears a device by which Luke can assign responsibility for the underrepresentation of the Jews in Christian ranks, to Jewish intransigence" (qtd. in Tyson *Luke-Acts* 22). This Jewish scholar uncovers a particularly important discrepancy in Acts. Luke is faced

with a formidable challenge: the incomprehensible absence of a strong Jewish base for a movement that sees itself as a continuation of Israel.

The expositors of the second position see the Gentile mission as supplementing the Jewish mission. Brawley is probably its strongest proponent. He opposes the theory “that sees Luke give up on the Jews as hopelessly hardened against the gospel and that he views them as providing antecedents for Christianity only as a part of a remote past” (155). As Brawley sees it, there is no rejection of the Jews as a whole, only unbelief from some (76-77). In his view, Luke is conciliatory towards them (72). The rejection in Acts does not concern the Pharisees; they are incomplete in their commitment to the faith (106). The Sadducees and the high priestly party are the real opponents to the Gospel (116). They temporarily sway the people to support the crucifixion, but the inhabitants of Jerusalem repent after the death of Jesus, and they serve as representative of the Jewish openness to the gospel (156). Brawley concludes that, “rather than setting Gentile Christianity free, Luke ties it to Judaism” (159).

A more cautious David Tiede recognizes the literary probability that contending attitudes attributed to God and the punishment of Israel is part and parcel of her heritage (qtd. in Tyson Luke-Acts 23). He remarks that “there is nothing anti-Jewish or foreign to Jewish tradition in such an indictment. The prophetic heritage long before taught how Israel’s history could be recited against her” (25). For him the question is that “God’s vengeance and vindication have their times of wrath and restoration, and the Messiah has already been exalted to God’s right hand as ‘leader and Savior’ in order to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sin. Then the mission of repentant Israel or of faithful Israel is also to be a ‘light to the Gentiles’” (33). The narrative of Acts and

especially its end can speak harshly to Israel, but it is still concerned with her and the era of repentance and restoration has been only inaugurated (33-4).

A tragic irony governs the relationship between Christianity and Judaism in the book of Acts, according to Robert Tannehill (qtd. in Tyson Luke-Acts 96). Luke is unable to explain why Israel failed to embrace Jesus as her promised Messiah (88). The reader is left with the tension between an unfulfilled promise, and an Israel that has rejected and still does not accept Jesus and the apostles (101).

The complement theory is epitomized by Jacob Jervell. He differs from both preceding positions because he sees the mission to the Gentiles as completing the mission to Israel. The Turn to the Gentiles is not a sign of a discarded Israel; even the closing episode in Rome indicates only that Paul has finished the ministry with Jews (Acts 28). “The true Israel is gathered, as far as the Jews go. Now the mission will go further, but solely to the Gentiles. What kinds of Gentiles? Exactly the same as Luke has dealt with throughout his work: the god-fearers” (qtd. in Tyson Luke-Acts 19). The new Christian constituency is either Jewish or familiar with Jewish tradition. Some Jews failed to convert, leaving the people of God divided, but many in Israel repented (Tyson People 49). Jervell dispels a common assumption by saying that “One usually understands the situation to imply that only when the Jews have rejected the gospel is the way opened to Gentiles. It is more correct to say that only when Israel has accepted the gospel can the way to Gentiles be opened.” After the gospel had been preached to a part of Israel that accepted the new faith, then all other nations can be reached. This elegant solution permits Jervell to explain Luke’s predicament when considering “why there is still an Israel alongside and unrelated to the Christian church to which the church is not

obligated. That Israel is composed of the unrepentant that refuses to convert. The new faith at this point is a Jewish movement that is gradually opening to the Gentile world...” (68).

What is striking in comparing these proposals is that their conclusions, although divergent, are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Each, however, suffers from considerable weaknesses. The Rejection thesis lacks evidence from Luke of a definitive breaking of Israel’s Covenant. It does not explain Luke’s seemingly conciliatory attitude toward Israel. The Supplement thesis cannot escape nor explain away the cumulative weight of the rejection and harsh judgments towards Israel contained in Acts. The Complement thesis also cannot explain the acridity of Paul’s declarations towards his opponents, nor explain why the majority of Israel continues to refuse to convert to the new faith.

With the exception of the contributions of Cook and Salmon, the Tyson compilation offers mostly interpretations which cannot provide a decisive argument to accept their position over the other options proposed. Each is plausible, when considered from a Christian anachronistic perspective. However, none of these approaches addresses fully the Jewish background in which Acts was written, including the ethnicity of its main characters, as well as its audience (Salmon qtd. in Tyson Luke-Acts 80-1). Each falls short, failing to consider that the author may be addressing Jewish readers, as well as new believers. All appear to overlook the Jewish religious context of the first century in which these stories are meant to be understood.

The Forgotten Jewish Context

Jewish readers of the first century may have understood the author's placement of languages in his Pentecost account as an intentional inclusion aimed specifically at them. Luke expects the reader to understand the symbolism of Pentecost. He argues that the events of Pentecost are heavenly mandated. Through the use of specific miracles, he conveys that a divine intervention has occurred and that the God of Israel (the Holy Spirit), has spoken to His people through the languages of the nations.

It is curious that the sages of Israel ended up taking a strong negative stance on the validity of this kind of divine intervention. The account of Rabbi Eliezer Ben Hyrcanus' banishment in the second century from the Sanhedrin is instructive in this instance. A tree, a stream, and moving walls, all intervene miraculously in favor of Eliezer's decision. Even a *Bat-qol*, – an extra-canonical heavenly voice or intervention, in Talmudic tradition – vouches for the rightness of his position. However, the other Rabbis stand together and oppose Eliezer because of his disrespect of their consensus opinion. From their point of view, neither miraculous divine intervention nor *shemu'ah* – The past is pattern – is valid (Goldin 297). The Rabbis will not accept either one as evidence for legal verdicts, and by extension, for religious ones (B. Baba Mesi' a 59b; P. Mo'ed Qatan 3.181 c-d; (B. M. 59b; Yer. M. K. iii. 81a *et seq.*).

Although it is understandable that the religious leaders of exiled Israel sought legitimacy of their authority when defending their legal and didactic enterprise, yet other issues seems to be the underpinnings of these partly etiological tales. The case of Rabbi Eliezer is probably emblematic of the definition of acceptable orthodoxy. Four concerns could fit the Rabbi's agenda. A *Bat-qol*, or reference to it, could not be valid – Talmudic

sages give no weight of authority to heavily echoes or further extra-canonical Torah revelations). Eliezer was not permitted to appeal to his own tradition in opposition to their consensus (Goldin 297). By implication, only the consensual interpretation of Scriptures could be retained. Finally, it is also significant that while Eliezer was typically held forth as an example of piety and knowledge, he was probably ostracized because he was portrayed as having accepted a *halakah*, or legal ordinance, from a partisan of Jesus (Tosefta, Chullin 2.24; B. Avodah Zarah, 16b-17a).

This accounts seems to single out Rabbi Eliezer as a conservative figure who is not willing to accept a new reality. The new reality, following the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem and the Temple, necessitated rebuilding the foundation of the entire basis of the belief structure of the remnant, and re-establish the authority of the Rabbis. The uncanny banishment of Rabbi Eliezer seems to be the test case of supremacy of the rabbinic authority over any vestiges of pre-70 A.D. state of affairs within the community.

This episode, however, has wider implications that bear upon issues raised by the Pentecost account and the Jesus movement. The orthodoxy of an important scholar of Judaism was compromised due to his acceptance of a heretical *Halakah*. A direct appeal to Scriptures is possible only if in accord with the consensus view, and appeals to pre-70 A.D. traditions outside of the consensus opinion have no force. Finally, a *Bat-qol* is no match to the concerted opinion of the Rabbis. Could the rabbinic tradition in these texts be meant in part to answer the claims of the *Bat-qol* of Pentecost and the Christian interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, for their constituency and for themselves? It is perhaps significant that we have no direct, recorded response by the Tannahim – the rabbinical sages – to the challenges raised by the events of Acts, and the presence of

Jewish Christianity. Accepting the parameter set by the Rabbis would immunize the Jewish community against the message of Paul and Pentecost. It is possible that a pre-70 A.D. Jewish reading of the Luke Pentecost needed to be offset and diffused by a strong integrative teaching from the Rabbis and others on this subject. This may be a hint that different approaches other than the Pharisees and later the consensus decision of the Rabbis were present before the fall of the Temple.

“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets: I know you do” (Acts 26.27). Paul expected King Agrippa to know and to answer his question in the affirmative. This passage indicates another frame of reference was active at the time, suggesting that an individual was expected to interact directly with Scriptures, and produce a personal interpretation quite different from the Rabbis of Eliezer’s day. In Acts, the *Bat-qol* of Pentecost looms large in the narrative to such an extent that the author highlights this puzzling event by putting in the mouth of the crowd a rhetorical question, “What does this mean?” (Acts 2.12). It is as if he would elicit from the reader the desire to understand and explore the meaning of what is being presented.

Pentecost as Babel

Luke describes Jewish believers from every nation hearing and understanding the wonders of *the Name* extolled in their own language. This usage is clearly conveying the miraculous, but it is also surprising from a different angle. Perusing the Hebrew Scriptures; one finds no direct connection between the nations’ languages and the feast of Pentecost. There is a possible indirect connection to Pentecost that could explain the miraculous appearance of these languages, and that is the episode of Babel (Genesis 11.1-

9). Commentaries on Acts routinely acknowledge Pentecost as a reversal of Babel, but few go beyond a vague mention of the *healing* of the division of the human race.

Languages in the Hebrew Scriptures also have another meaning. The author appears to use an allusion connecting Pentecost to Babel in his narrative, but in an indirect manner and with a twist of his own.

The author of Acts incorporates the theme of languages to Pentecost, but not as a complete correspondence between Babel and Pentecost, nor as an exact reversal. In the Babel episode, God judges and confuses humans by creating languages. The people involved at Babel are dispersed by God. However, at the Pentecost event, God instead uses the languages of the nations to open the way to understanding the message of Peter, and to convince Jewish believers of the Diaspora to be united to the Jesus community. Why incorporate a reference to Babel if it is not a repetition or a reversal? Luke, who writes with intentionality and with reference to the Septuagint (LXX), presents the Deity as drawing Jewish followers away from the Temple celebration, inviting them to the new form of acceptable piety and converting those same hearers to an alternative version of Judaism. While all the participants do not revert back to one pristine language –as would be expected in a reversal of Babel – they are enabled to overcome the limitations in communication imposed by Babel. The stunned hearers understand the gospel message in their own language, repent and are aggregated into the Jesus community. This heavenly intervention is presented throughout the book of Acts as decisive, and serves as the motor of the actions and decisions of those that follow this new ‘Way’ (Act 24.14). The point that must be emphasized is that the author uses the voice of the nations to signify that the God of Israel speaks to His people.

There is a curious phenomenon in the Hebrew Scriptures. I will call it the *Babel Paradox*. God uses a methodology that was applied earlier to separate people, in order to bring them together in a new way. At Babel, God chastised humanity by creating the nations' languages, making sure they will not understand each other. The text tells us that this was done to deny men the ability to seek God or divinity in their own terms. God then immediately begins a new undertaking in Genesis chapter twelve, establishing a particular nation as His own in order to make a pathway to draw all nations to Himself. His chosen people are to keep themselves separate and pure, but are meant to serve as a light to the Gentiles. God select a people to speak to, knowing that they often will ignore His words. He uses the incomprehensibility of the languages of the nations both as a threat of judgment, and as a means of indicating that the judgment originates from Him. The nations themselves are pushed aside, but God maintains them for use in correcting His chosen people.

Chapter twenty-eight of Deuteronomy is concerned the covenantal Curses and Blessings, and prophecies a horrible punishment against an unfaithful Israel. One of these curses is found in verse forty-nine:

The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand. (All quotations are from the NIV otherwise quoted).

It is fascinating to read that one of the punishments promised to Israel was to be subservient to an enemy from the ends of the world, and that the incomprehensibility of the language of the oppressors was part of Israel's punishment. The Deity specifically sets up a situation where His people's inability to understand the languages of the Assyrians and the Babylonians serves as a message from God. It is Babel revisited, but now the curse is prophesied by God and applied to His people in a context of covenantal

rupture. The prophetic tradition would take this curse and apply it as a prophecy, that the Assyrians and the Babylonians would come from the ends of the world to enslave the people and destroy the Covenant of unfaithful Israel. The distinguishing mark of the heavenly punishment was the incomprehensibility of the oppressor's language. Isaiah mentions this heavenly intrusion twice, and Jeremiah once (Isa 28.11; 33.19; Jer 5.15). The following selection from the Septuagint is concerned with the last of these texts, Jeremiahs 5.15. This text functions like an epitome of the Babel Paradox. The Babylonian language incomprehensibility is a sign of the heavenly retribution, (v. 15). Yet, several themes of Punishment and redemption are also elaborated:

Therefore thus saith the Lord Almighty, Because ye have spoken this word, behold, I have made my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them. ¹⁵ Behold, I *will* bring upon you a nation from far, O house of Israel, saith the Lord; a nation the sound of whose language one shall not understand. ¹⁶ *They are* all mighty men: ¹⁷ and they shall devour your harvest, and your bread; and shall devour your sons, and your daughters; and they shall devour your sheep, and your calves, and devour your vineyards, and your fig-plantations, and your olive yards: and they shall utterly destroy your strong cities, wherein ye trusted, with the sword. ¹⁸ And it shall come to pass in those days, saith the Lord thy God, that I will not utterly destroy you.

¹⁹ And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say, Wherefore has the Lord our God done all these things to us? that thou shalt say to them, Because ye served strange gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not yours.

²⁰ Proclaim these things to the house of Jacob, and let them be heard in the house of Juda. ²¹ Hear ye now these things, O foolish and senseless people; who have eyes, and see not; and have ears, and hear not: ²² will ye not be afraid of me? saith the Lord; and will ye not fear before me, who have set the sand for a bound to the sea, *as* a perpetual ordinance, and it shall not pass it: yea, it shall rage, but not prevail; and its waves shall roar, but not pass over it. (Jer 5.14-22 LXX).

For the Hebrew Scriptures, one of the prerogatives of God is the mastery of human languages – within His relationship with humanity in general and particularly with the Covenant with His Israel. Israel will be exiled, and for the prophets, the mark *par*

excellence of this heavenly intervention is that the punishment will be administered by the Babylonian oppressors and specifically through language, which will be incomprehensible to the Israelites (Deut. 28.45-52; Isa 28.11; 33.18-19; Jer 5.10-17). The mention of willful refusal to see or hear on the part of the people will be addressed later in this work. Suffice it to say that its symbolism is strongly associated with a covenantal destruction and exile for those addressed by the prophet. Yet, a note of redemption appears in verse nineteen which highlights the didactic intent of the Deity toward His people. God intends to use the ungodly to teach godliness to His own people, and use idolatrous nations to cure the nation of Israel of her own idolatry (v. 19).

The same paradox was incorporated by Luke in his use of the languages of the nations. The author of Acts does not explicitly allude to Babel, and as has been noted, his account is neither a repetition nor an exact reversal of the Babel curse. Luke simply introduces the subject of languages and presents a failure to understand among some of the hearers, “They have had too much wine” (Acts 2.13b). This at least opens the Babel Paradox as an interpretative option, but if this were the only mention of the unintelligibility of language as punishment, this case could be inconclusive. It will be necessary to look for other indications scattered throughout the work to establish the plausibility of this view.

The first indication that the Babel Paradox may be at work in Acts is seen in the two kinds of hearers and their reactions. The Diaspora Jews understood and consequently converted to the new faith through the preaching of Peter. The text mentions that there were others in the crowd, however, who did not understand what was

being said and declared; “They have had too much wine” (Acts 2.13b). The presence of two different kinds of reaction to the miraculous events is portrayed. It represents a reversal of the curse for those who are able to understand. The repetition of incoherent babble for those who do not is also presented as a message. This literary scheme permits Luke to apply the negative connotation of Babel to some of his Pentecost audience, while providing a new, more positive reason for those who accept it to move beyond the tenets of their Jewish piety.

The speaking of languages is repeated in two other places in the book of Acts – Caesarea and Ephesus. An event happening one time could be ignored; however its repetition three times in the same book is a clue to its elevated significance. (Pervo, Acts 469). On each occasion, a miracle is implied by Luke. The Holy Spirit (God) moves human beings to speak in foreign languages. Why does the author make the God of Israel speak in such a manner to His people? Moreover, the setting of these accounts is important, because these repetitions are placed at significant and indispensable moments of transition for the Christian faith from a Jewish setting to the wider Gentile world.

The three Pentecosts and their languages seem to be set intentionally in a Jewish context, particularly at Jerusalem and at Caesarea, but also, significantly, as late as in the ministry of Paul at Ephesus. There are too many indications that point to an intentional use of languages in the book of Acts to continue to ignore the plausibility of their significance from a covenantal viewpoint. Finally, since a doctrine of covenantal rupture between God and Israel is found ready-made in the Hebrew Scriptures, it can be adopted coherently as a hermeneutical key to the composition of Acts.

Luke's primary purpose in writing Acts was most likely to present the ministry of Paul (Brawley 57). It will be shown that Paul's understanding of glossais arises from Isaiah 28.11. This provides a consistent link to a judicial perspective of the occurrence of languages at Pentecost, and serves as a reasonable basis for understanding Luke's usage of the term in the book of Acts. This reference can unlock the motif's meaning in the text, while also illuminating the narratives of both Peter's and Paul's preaching, and their rejection by both the majority of the leaders and people of Israel. Israel's rejection of Peter's and Paul's message is one of the strongest features of the book of Acts. Such epochal significance would substantiate Luke's development of the theme of *judgment*, as he describes the Christian community's struggle with the Temple authority and the Jewish nation as a whole.

Paul's view provides an extrinsic explanation of glossais, which Luke, in his description of the Day of Pentecost, omits. What significance he gives to the term is not explicitly defined in Acts and can only be approached through the writings of Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. Luke, as Paul's *protégé*, would most likely have applied the term in the same sense as is used by the hero of his narrative. Once the use of glossais by Paul is understood, it provides a reasonable first-century context that predates the writing of Luke-Acts, one that was probably available to Luke.

Paul's Explanation

Paul's explanation of glossais is not directly connected to a study of Acts, but his reference to the prophetic tradition of covenantal rupture is vital. Paul and Luke are the only New Testament writers who deal with the experience of languages, while Paul is the

only first-century Christian who provides an exposition of its meaning. The term does appear in Mark as well, without any explanation of its function, foretelling the appearance of glossais at a future date (Mark 16:17). Paul's assignment, in First Corinthians 14:20-22, of a strong covenantal significance to the gift should not be missed.

Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. In the Law it is written:

“Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me,” says the Lord.

Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.

He identifies the Corinthians' practice of incomprehensible language or languages as erroneous. He criticizes their use of incomprehensible language as childish, and by implication, selfish. The proper application of languages is not as a sign for believers, but rather a sign to unbelievers. While Paul, in verses one to nineteen, acknowledges a limited value of the language as practiced by some of them; in verses twenty to twenty-two, he provides instruction to them on the purpose God has for them when the gift of Language is manifested among them (I Cor 14:1-22).

Verse 21 is a direct quotation of Isaiah 28:11, which Paul uses to explain the meaning of the gift of Languages to the naive Corinthians. Paul cites Isaiah in order to lend authority to his major point. Furthermore, he points out to them that this design is already present in the prophetic tradition. The stubborn impenitence of the people during Isaiah's ministry forced him to prophesy about a coming judgment. Paul seems to appropriate the same prophetic function as Isaiah did. The nation that refused to hear His prophet would be dealt with by the Deity through a language they would not understand.

He leaves open the possibility that Israel's dismissal of the message of her Messiah will be a repeat of the same predicament.

Three other passages have been proposed to explain the significance of speaking in 'Tongues.' They are Acts 1.8; Romans 8.26; and First Corinthians 14.4. In the first, Luke transitions from the ministry of Christ to that of the apostles by saying: "But 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" (Acts 1.8). This verse indicates only that through the Spirit's power the disciples will witness to Israel and to the ends of the world. It anticipates the actions of the rest of the book in general, but does not mention nor specifically refer to languages. It can identify one potentially positive interpretation of their meaning, but is not at all instrumental in its definition. Luke's emphasis on the gift of Languages serves to identify divine approval in each instance it occurs, but there are clearly more negative aspects to glossais as a warning to Israel, which Acts 1.8 does not address.

The next commonly cited passage; Romans 8.26 is particularly unsuitable for giving an explanation to the gift of Languages, reading:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.
We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit
himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

This text speaks of a work of the Spirit to intercede before God in a way that is beyond human expression, alleviating the predictable struggle of the follower who is facing the difficulties of the Christian experience. There is not a direct connection to either human or spiritual languages. Paul in Romans favorably identifies the ability of the Spirit to intercede in situations that the Christian believers cannot fully understand nor express.

This intercession cannot be equated with the Corinthian error that Paul has attacked repeatedly – *contra* Gordon Fee, respectfully (577, note 311). The concept of spiritual intercession is not found in Paul’s First Corinthians explanation of languages nor within Paul’s corrections to the Corinthian practice. The context of the Romans passage is addressed to the believer who is struggling with physical or spiritual oppression, while the Corinthian situation addresses believers who are perhaps too self-engrossed.

First Corinthians 14.4 is also commonly used as a source to explain the gift, but only if quoted partially. The verse is seldom quoted fully. “The one who speaks in languages edifies himself” (I Cor. 14.4a). This is only a fragment of Paul’s intended point. It is not an assertion that should be taken alone, but rather that it is the negative side of a contrast in which Paul juxtaposes the selfish, immature attitude of the Corinthians with a positive higher ideal. The context of First Corinthians is a spirit of division and strife that requires Paul’s correction.

The contrastive nature of First Corinthians fourteen is infrequently identified by commentators. Many have lost sight of the general context of First Corinthians and have ignored the didactic, concessionary, but remedial intent of Paul in writing the letter. He has learned that the assembly is filled with divisions, and desires to see them develop a different gift in place of incomprehensible languages – the positive side of his contrast: “...but he who prophesies edifies the assembly” (I Cor. 14.4b). He continues to expand on this contrast in First Corinthians 14.20 with “languages are not for believers, but for unbelievers.” This disparity indicates that while believers are the recipients of this gift, as with every other spiritual gift, it is not given to them for their benefit alone. Paul shows in verse twenty-two that this gift is directed primarily toward unbelievers, by

appealing to the authority of the prophet Isaiah. The situation of Isaiah 28.11 is applied to show his naïve charges that the properly understood and properly applied gift of human languages is meant to be a sign to unfaithful Israel. Their selfish practice, the incomprehensible “tongue (s)” of chapter fourteen, is abnormal in the functioning of their assembly, especially when compared with the gift of prophecy.

In First Corinthians thirteen, Paul exhorts the assembly to strive for love, above all. He then returns in chapter fourteen to the subject of languages, using a contrastive argumentation which consists of granting the value of his dear spiritual children’s wayward position, and then showing its inadequacy when set beside a higher standard of love and unity. Paul in verse 14:4a applies this technique when he rebuffs the self-edification that results from speaking in an incomprehensible tongue (the Corinthians’ practice), and continues in 4b to assert that prophecy would result in edification of the entire assembly. As their spiritual father, Paul’s desire is neither to quench their spirit nor belittle their worship practices, but he is calling them to a deeper worship experience. His repetition of this contrastive method, where the current practices of the assembly are consistently based on the minor term of each comparison, allows him not to belittle the spiritual thirst that the assembly of Corinth covets, but instead steer them to desire a greater spirituality and the pursuit of spiritual gifts that will strengthen the assembly.

Paul’s demonstration must not be missed, because it conditioned the interpretation of the subsequent verses of chapter fourteen. A visual presentation of the main passage in this controversy will complete and clarify its meaning:

First Corinthians 14.4a and b

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| a | He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, | b | but he who prophecies edifies the church. |
|---|--|---|---|

Verse 4a is *unable* to carry the necessary exegetical weight to act as a sufficient explanation of, or justification for a corporate exercise of the gift of Languages. As noted above, it is not a complete thought, and cannot be taken as a definition, since it is qualified by verse 4b, “but he who prophesies edifies the church.” Verse 4a is not a command, only a lesser or negative part of a contrast established by Paul, which he develops further throughout the entirety of chapter fourteen. The self-expression contained in verse 4a can be understood, at best, as promoting the well-being of the individual, but since it is the minor term of the contrast, it is probably understood here bearing, for Paul, a negative connotation. Moreover, it would be at loggerheads with Paul’s strategy of building up the community.

Various authors attempt to shed light on the meaning of this passage and particularly to illustrate Paul’s contrastive argumentation in chapter fourteen through the use of charts (Hovenden 145; Spence 93-4). This visual method has the advantage of permitting one to see at once the structure of the passage. Paul’s use of these contrasts clearly indicates the nature of his letter to the Corinthians. The setting of this contrast is in a didactic correction of Paul to his flock. Paul is not composing a doctrinal teaching as in others of his letters. The situation in Corinth is such that he must use his apostolic authority to intervene and correct the misguided understanding of the Corinthian assembly of the use of spiritual gifts and particularly the gift of Languages. A lack of awareness of this background and of the contrastive nature of the passage can lead one to fall into the error of taking fragments of thoughts as exegetical certainties.

The chart that follows is a translation of Ralph Shallis’ chart (137). Unlike Hovenden’s shorter selection, it is more appropriate to this topic, covering verse one to

nineteen of chapter fourteen. Unlike Spence, it follows the flow of the text, and so is less open to accusation of ideological manipulations. While some different assignments could be made in terms of which clause belongs on the right or the left side of the chart, those changes would not affect the overall conclusion that Paul favors the subservience of individual edification to the edification of the entire body of the assembly. The left side shows the practice of the Corinthians; the right side express Paul's counsels. The prepositional qualifiers which denote the contrast are set in bold type.

Contrast of First Corinthian 14.1 to 19.

The practice of the Corinthians

Paul's counsels or corrections

Prepositional qualifiers (in bold)

- 1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.
- 2a For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit,
- 3 **but** everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.
- 4a He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself,
- 4b **but** he who prophesies edifies the church.
- 5a I would like every one of you to speak in tongues,
- 5b **but** I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.
- 6 **Now**, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?
- 7 Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes?
- 8 Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?
- 9 So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.
- 10 Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning.
- 11 If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me.

12a So it is with you, since you are eager to have spiritual gifts	12b try to excel in gifts that build up the church.
	13 For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says.
14a For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays,	14b but my mind is unfruitful.
15a So what shall I do, I will pray with my spirit,	15b but I will also pray with my mind;
15c I will sing with my spirit,	15d but I will also sing with my mind.
16a If you are praising God with your spirit	16b how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying?
	17b but the other man is not edified.
17a You may be giving thanks well enough,	
18a I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you,	19b but in the church I would rather speak intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.
	20 Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults

The unsuitability of First Corinthians 14.4a to explain the meaning of languages is strengthened by examining this chart. The contrastive nature of verse 4b is not an anomaly. $\delta\epsilon$, translated as *but* by the NIV, acts as a contrastive linkage, appearing eight times in nineteen verses. Paul is conciliatory toward practices on the left side of each contrast, but points out, by the use of the qualifier $\delta\epsilon$, the primacy of the edification of the other and the assembly. For a clear study on this point, see Margaret M. Mitchell’s book (279-281). At the conclusion of this contrastive discussion, Paul calls them to stop being childish in their practice and to understand as adults the gift of Languages.

While, in verse 21 Paul quotes Isaiah 28.11, he may have intended them to consider the larger context of that chapter (Heil 192). It mentions judgment related to babes and the spiritually immature or proud, led by drunken priests and prophets.

Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah, after asking them to think like adults, expecting them to carefully consider the significance of the prophet's situation. Isaiah's contemporaries were mocking the prophet as though they were children mimicking Isaiah with nonsensical strophes. The Corinthians were in a better disposition, but were still being childish. In their newly found spirituality, they were forgetting that gifts were given for the common edification, and not for the benefit of the individual practicing the gift – a point well addressed by in his Thiselton commentary on First Corinthians (244). For Paul, it appeared doubtful that the Spirit was speaking through them, since the results are not in accord with the Spirit's purpose in giving the gift. The fruit of this practice was neither a warning to unbelievers, nor edification of others – instead yielding recipients who focus on themselves, and non-recipients who remain confused and ignorant.

Verse twenty-one serves as the conclusion of Paul's argument. When it is read carelessly or without context, the contrastive nature of chapter fourteen is easily missed, resulting in the mistaken belief that the gift of Languages is for believers' edification. Paul's appeal to Isaiah's text is lost. Lockwood, in the Concordia Commentary on First Corinthians, unlocks this judicial understanding (490). Of course, our contemporaries in the twenty-first century are not in the same time continuum as the Corinthians, who could appreciate Paul's allusion, since they very likely saw themselves as still a part of Judaism. The Jewish character of the Christian movement was still an integral part of its worship and life. A reference from a prophet had authority well beyond what it has in today's Christian churches. At the same time, they could not help but be aware that, even if their faith was Jewish, they

were estranged from the synagogue. A verse quoting a prophet's message of dissolution of Israel's Covenant would have explained their uneasy relation with the Jewish faith, while addressing their erroneous attribution of the meaning of the gift. To the Corinthians, Paul's identification of the people of the prophet's quotation was not difficult, since the synagogue of their city had excluded their father in the faith, the apostle Paul. When these words were read in the assembly, they were understood according to their immediate historical context:

In the Law it is written:
"Through men of strange tongues'
And through the lips of foreigners
I will speak to this people
But even then they will not listen to me,"
says the Lord. (I Cor 14.20-21, NIV)

As the assembly read these verses, it was not necessary to elucidate who were the people intended by Paul. Logically, it refers to the Jewish people, for whom Isaiah prophesied exile and dissolution of their Covenant, and includes at least the implication of culpability for the Jewish people of the first century. A similar logical contextual antecedent in the letter refers also to the disobedient children of Israel, "Do not be idolaters as some of them were: as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance'" (I Cor. 10.7). This second reference to "the people" is remarkable and provides for the Corinthians a powerful context. It strongly reinforces the judicial interpretation of Isaiah 28.11.

We must remember that it is at Corinth that Luke places his second "turning to the Gentiles", and has Paul utter his declaration of innocence from the blood of the synagogue traditionalists (Nielsen 87). It is reasonable to conclude that Paul – with his experience of rejection and violent opposition to his message – sees the sign of

Languages as having a specific application to his day at Corinth, according to the meaning that it has in the prophet Isaiah. For instance, Fee, in his examination of this passage, concludes, “Most likely, Paul is using the word ‘sign’, in a way that is quite in keeping with his Judaic background, where ‘sign’ functions as an expression of God’s attitude, something that ‘signifies’ to Israel either his disapproval or pleasure” (682). In Paul’s day, the ‘unbelievers’ were the people of the Jewish nation who, for Luke, rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Languages in Acts

A study of Paul’s position on languages at Corinth is valuable, before attempting to appreciate the meaning it has for Luke. Paul’s is the only contemporary explanation that we have for the term. A quotation in the Gospel of Mark chapter sixteen only mentions languages and is probably a late addition (16.17; France 345). Modern scholarship assigns three possible interpretations of the languages of Pentecost; a miracle of speaking in foreign languages, a miracle of hearing and understanding, or a miracle of speaking in an ecstatic language, also understood through a miracle of hearing. In selecting among these choices, the only guidance we have available to us is the teaching of Paul.

Most scholars agree that Acts chapter two’s context strongly supports the interpretation of languages as describing human languages. In verse four the author explicitly notes that the apostles began to speak in languages. In verse eight, those listening exclaim, “Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?” The author establishes a correspondence between speaking and hearing,

but speaking appears to have been given a more prominent role. Also, the term glossais is tied to the native languages, *dialectos*, of the Diaspora Jews that were present. There are those that argue that a miracle of hearing happens in this instance; however, since the author plainly states that the speaking of the apostles was a miracle of *xenolalia*, it is unlikely that Luke intended for the reader to conclude that a different miracle occurred instead. Professor Turner has clearly demonstrated that such position is untenable (226-228).

This concept of a miracle of hearing is also required to justify the hypothesis that the languages refer to ecstatic languages. Its adherents assume that their definition and practice of glossais is similar to the situation Paul addresses in First Corinthians. In addition to overcoming the objections of Professor Turner, no information is available to us about the nature of the language (s) used in the Corinthian assembly (Garcia 184-7). Paul does define glossais as foreign languages for the Corinthian assembly, but does not specifically define their activities and practice. This renders this interpretation extremely problematic.

The hypothesis of ecstatic languages really hinges on the interpretation of glossais in the two other instances where it is used in Acts. Some scholars have understood them as representing a different kind of experience. Haenchen, particularly, claims that the next two instances of the gift of Languages in the book of Acts, (Acts 10.46-47 and 19.1-6), are concerned with ecstatic languages (54, 554). This position raises issues within the text itself. Luke links the Jerusalem and Caesarea Pentecosts, with the Gentiles speaking languages through the authority and guidance of the apostle Peter (Acts 10.49). When, in verse forty-seven, the Gentiles

of Cornelius's household received the gift, the author has Peter order the new believers to be baptized with this justification: "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." Luke reiterates this statement two more times in his work, and this repetition indicates the importance for Luke to connect the Pentecost of Caesarea as closely as possible with the one of Jerusalem (Acts 10.47; 11.15; 15.8). It would have been a substantially less convincing argument for the church of Jerusalem if the experience of the Holy Spirit by Gentiles was a significantly different one than their own experience at Pentecost. This would appear to indicate that the author of Acts does not envisage Caesarea as a different phenomenon, i.e., ecstatic utterances, but rather a repetition of the Jerusalem Pentecost. This linkage makes it doubtful that interpreting languages as ecstatic is the best hermeneutical choice. To postulate ecstatic utterances here would demand an equivalently strong reason that cannot be produced from the actual claim of the document.

The same reasoning applies to the other occasion in Acts 19.1-6, in which the disciples of John the Baptist spoke in glossais. Luke neither explicitly describes the nature of the phenomenon nor seems to directly tie it to prior events. Yet, since Luke writes a continuous narrative, it seems logical that when speaking again about languages, he does not need to repeat the description of the phenomenon. With no other context provided, it is most likely that he is referring back to his previous portrayal of the phenomenon. His silence cannot be construed as the introduction of ecstatic languages, but should be understood as simple editorial economy in which an author relied on previous description of a similar event in the body of the text.

The Jerusalem Pentecost

Luke's portrayal of the audience at Pentecost is amenable to a judicial interpretation. Luke divides the actors into three categories. The first group is made of the Galileans who followed Jesus and who are the recipients of the gift of Languages. The second group comprises the pious Jews of the Diaspora; along with the proselytes who understand what is being said (Acts 2.5-11). The third group consists of those who mock the recipients of languages. Peter addresses them along with others worshipers, when it says "Then Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem...'" (Acts 2.14).

The message is addressed both to the pious Jews well as the third group, most likely Judeans living in Jerusalem who are mocking the apostles with, "They had too much wine." Those of the Diaspora understand the languages, and by implication, convert at the call of Peter for repentance and faith. Judeans and Jerusalemites – those who do not understand – mock the ones speaking– (the Galileans), probably do not convert, and therefore fall under the condemnation of the sign of Languages. The presence of a mocking audience would fit a judicial understanding of the miracle of Languages at the Day of Pentecost.

In this light, the histrionic elements of the initial appearance of glossais, rather than being ancillary details of the narrative, become important pointers to the judicial understanding. These items situate the action in a specific context within Jewish culture – in the Temple, in Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost. The languages of

other nations, along with the wind, sound and fire, all have antecedents in the Jewish literature, as well as parallels in Christian literature. These features work together to strengthen the connection of languages with the notion of judgment. The failure of the third group to understand the implied judgment introduces the Babel Paradox to Acts. The fact that the message is not being understood serves as a message in itself.

Pentecost and Sinai

It is probably not coincidental that Jewish lectionaries contain a reading in Genesis 11 for the week of Pentecost (Montague 134). This correspondence might be explained by a use of a common source antedating both the writing of Acts and the publishing of the lectionaries. Rabbinical traditions link the festival of Pentecost with the giving of the law at Sinai. Israel accepts the Law, but only after the seventy voices of God (cf. Num 11.25-26) go to the nations of the world which reject the Law (Midrash Tanhuma 26.c; TB Pesahim 68; b; Mek. Yitro, Pes. R. K. 103b, 186a, 200a). This linkage is of interest, since it appears that the Nation of Israel saw the celebration of the feast of Pentecost as the ‘anniversary’ of the establishment of their Covenant with God. Luke may have chosen the feast as the setting of the Christian Pentecost event to indicate an exercise of the Babel Paradox, indicating a closure of the Covenant to those who rejects his apostles, and it is a transition to those who do.

Rabbinical traditions link the giving of the Law with seventy languages of the nations, which only could have appeared as a consequence of the judgment at Babel. The original meaning of Pentecost as given in the Law was simply as an agricultural festival. It is noteworthy that the time reference between the Exodus and the Giving

of the Law at Sinai falls near the time of Pentecost and it is natural to make this inference (Hovenden 77).

Luke alludes directly to the dispersion of humanity after Babel, and indirectly to the notion of judgment and confusion of the nations; yet the Rabbis do share the same notion but ignore the reversal of Deuteronomy twenty-eight. Did the Rabbis reemphasize, for the sake of their community, the notion that the judgment of Babel was only applicable to the nations? It could be that they were unable to avoid the notion of languages, Babel and judgment for Israel, however, because it was present in the source known to their constituency.

Could it be that they found it necessary to create this tradition as the springboard for their teachings, as dictated by their new religious situation, and as they were being confronted by Christianity? Both Christianity and Judaism celebrate this feast; its meaning is not directly connected to the tradition of the Hebrew people, unlike Passover or Purim which are both already charged with enough historical meaning. Could the events described in Acts, containing elements of language and judgment, have forced the Rabbis to develop a teaching that explained the confusion of languages in a more positive light for their constituency? If this hypothesis was true, no one would expect the Rabbis to specifically link an explanation of the sign of Languages to the historical events of Acts, but to develop a Jewish logic for the festival to explain a notorious event in the Christian calendar that shares the same date. They would also minimize the impact of the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. by avoiding Pentecost as viewed through the prophetic Christian interpretation

of fall and exile, but instead favor a post 70 A.D. Pharisaic interpretation of the Law at Sinai as Israel's priestly vocation and compliance to the will of God.

Additionally, this can explain the various references in rabbinical literature about the voice of Sinai going to the nations of the world pertain probably to the substratum of lore prior to the first century. It seems that a reversal theme will be understandable, if the author knew these references. It must be noted also that the giving of the Law is not without themes of fear and judgment as it is described in the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as in Christian text. These themes are linked to a sense of awe in relating to Israel's Deity (Deut 4.11, 12; 5.22-26; Exo19.12-19; 20.18-21; Heb 2.2,10,28; 12.18-22).

The Hebrew Scriptures is the only common authority that would be referred to by almost all Jewish groups, including the new Christian community. The Hebrew Scriptures set the ground rules and examples to which the teaching of various groups must accommodate. If the teachers of the Law were obligated to provide an explanation for an event involving a sign on Languages that was disagreeable to them, they could only do so by using the existing references in the Hebrew Scriptures. This could explain why Jewish and Christian groups would use different texts and interpretations from the Hebrew Scriptures for the development of their linkage of Pentecost with Babel or Sinai and the giving of the Law. As seen above in the case of Rabbi Eliezer, as they set, after the catastrophe, a consensual authority, they could shed light on any obscurity by overseeing a consensually unique interpretation of their significance.

From the perspective of Luke's audience, Theophilus, the rhetoric of punishment and exile would have been evident, because it is already present in the Hebrew Scriptures. This tradition of reversal was already part and parcel of both Israel's history and prophetic tradition, well before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Tiede qtd. in Tyson Luke-Acts 23). If Luke chose to incorporate this tradition into his description of the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, he did not invent a new theme. He rather used existing imagery in order to explain the failure of Israel to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, and imply the consequences that follow that decision. It is now those in Israel, who will not listen to the gospel, who are warned of their impending rejection by the Deity.

The newly emerging community believed they retain continuity with their sacred Jewish history (Jervell 42). They saw Christ as fulfilling the old Covenant and establishing a new one. They declare that those who reject the message of Christ are clinging to a Covenant which has become obsolete (cf. Heb 8.13). The motif of covenantal blessings and curses could have been seen as a perfect fit to show that it was not they who left their faith, but their opponents who failed to perceive the historical movement of the Deity. Luke painted the Holy Spirit as the one who initiated Pentecost, and validated their decision to break with Judaism.

Fire

Fire is a feature of the Holy Spirit coming on the Day of Pentecost that is typically given too little attention. In both Testaments, fire is often linked with the notion of judgment. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah achieved an iconic

stature in the Hebrew thought (Genesis 19.1-29). The most significant New Testament text in this regard is the one attributed to John the Baptist about the giving of the Spirit, which occurs in all four Gospels (Matt 3.11, Mark 1.8, Luke 3.16; John 1.33).

A curious phenomenon appears when these accounts are compared. Mark and John mention only a baptism of water. Matthew and Luke mention both a baptism of water and a baptism of fire. The context of the former two does not include Pharisees or unbelievers. In Matthew, John the Baptist speaks directly to the Pharisees and inveighs against their crude understanding of baptism's significance (Mat 3.7-11). In Luke, the term Pharisees is not directly mentioned, but these are included by implication in the multitudes who come to hear John preaching. Starting off his quotation with "brood of vipers," the author clearly indicates some in the audience are under God's judgment. In contrast with Matthew's account, Luke expands the concept of 'winnowing the good grain' into ethical teachings for the crowd, the tax collectors, and the soldiers, and into four verses, as compared to the single verse contained in Matthew (Luke 3.10-14; cf. Mat 3.12). There are those in the audience who refuse to repent because they trust in their works and covenantal privileges to be enough to save them from judgment, but it is the fire of hell in which they will be baptized. Luke includes the baptism of fire as judgment in John's prophecy, so including the presence of fire appearing with the baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost may be seen as an intentional fulfillment of the earlier prediction. Josephus' account of the fall of Jerusalem confirms that fire conceived as a judgment from God is a contemporary theme of the first century.

And this seems to me to have been the reason why God, out his hatred to these men's wickedness, rejected our city; and as for the temple, he no longer esteemed it sufficiently pure for him to inhabit therein, but brought the Romans upon us, and threw a fire upon the city to purge it; and brought upon us, our wives, and children, slavery,- as desirous to make us wise by our calamities (J. A. 20.166 pp 535-36).

And who is there that does not know what the writings of the ancient prophets contain in them,- and particularly that oracles which is just now going to be fulfilled upon this miserable city – for they foretold that this city should be then taken when somebody shall begin the slaughter of his own countrymen? 110 and are both the city and the entire temple now full of the dead bodies of your countrymen? It is god therefore, it is God himself who is bringing on this fire, to purge that city and temple by means of the Romans, and is going to pluck up this city which is full of your pollution (J. W. 6.109 p 732).

Josephus takes the *Sicarii* crimes – those of the Jewish Zealots – as the cause of the destruction of Jerusalem, and he understands that the heavenly retribution is implemented through a purifying fire. The prophecy of John of a judicial fire prefigures the destruction of the Temple institutions, Jerusalem, and the covenanted people of God. Seen in this light, the covenantal feature of the episode is an attractive explanation of the phenomenon and reinforces the idea that Luke is using the Babel Paradox in describing this event. The fire is seen as simultaneously purifying the new congregation and also placing judgment upon Israel.

The Sound and Wind

The sound and wind of Pentecost are other features of the event that indicate a connection with the Jewish culture. Witherington notes also the various parallels with the Hebrew Scripture theophanies. In this context, the sound and the wind would simply be indicative of God's presence at the event. Conzelmann notes that physical parallels between Luke and Philo's descriptions of the giving of the Law at

Sinai (16; Witherington 131). Philo's description of an almost physical voice/sound corresponds so closely that the most reasonable conclusion is that either Luke copies Philo or shares the same source. This allows Luke to establish an indirect connection between Pentecost and the giving of the Law (132). Fitzmyer asserts that some Jews, particularly the group following the book of Jubilee, linked the value of covenantal renewing to Pentecost (233). This interpretation would have predated the writing of Acts. He observes: "In the Lucan story of Pentecost there is not direct reference to the Sinaitic Covenant, but indirect allusions reveal that Luke was aware of the association of Pentecost with the renewal of that Covenant" (234). Fitzmyer extends his point by noting that Pentecost follows the pattern of Jewish festive assemblies and that the Eleven, with Peter, act as the judges of Israel. He builds on Dupont's work concerning the verbal correspondence between Acts and Exodus chapters nineteen and twenty.

Fitzmyer's demonstration affirms Luke's intention to integrate allusions to the giving of the Law and its renewal within his account. These elements fit perfectly within the Babel Paradox parameters. In this schema they function as the physical instruments by which the Deity baptizes the new faith community, while confirming by repeated signs the coming judgment on the unbelieving among the Israelite nation.

The Temple

The mighty sound, the tongues of fire and the languages of all humanity serve to convey a sense of the supernatural presence of God while proclaiming that a new era has begun. The Holy Spirit is now present among the disciples. All the logistical

elements of the coming of the Spirit, when viewed through the prism of Isaiah 28.11, support a context of judgment. Not only do these elements contribute to this interpretation, but the place where the author sets them also possesses great significance. At the end of his first volume, he carefully indicates that “they stayed continually at the Temple, praising God” (Luke 24.53). Even if the book of Acts does not tell us the exact location of the house in which the apostles were seized by the Spirit, it is reasonable to assume that they remained where Luke put them in his first volume - at or near the Temple compound. It’s probable that their lodging and meeting space were both near the site of the Temple.

The Temple physically and spiritually held an important place for not only its administrators – the High Priest and the Herodians – but also for the nation at large. There were already specialized niches within Jerusalem that were accommodating the diverse schools of Judaism, each with established gathering spots within the Temple complex. Even the ascetic Essenes had access to the Temple, and with priests who were at least sympathetic to their viewpoint and performed sacrifice for them. Allusions to Temple life occur in Luke’s earlier work in the narratives of Zechariah, Simeon and Anna. Luke never let the narrative slip too far away from the Temple grounds. The subsequent chapters of Acts will maintain the presence of the disciples in the Temple. The Temple authorities could not restrict access to the actual Temple grounds, but had to tolerate different strands of Judaism.

The text also includes clues to the timing of the Jerusalem Pentecost. The three thousand devout Jews who make up part of the audience were most likely assembled at the gates awaiting entry to the Temple for the morning sacrifice. The

diversity among those in the crowd may tend to support this idea. The discourse of Peter directed to a great number of listeners can only be understood as taking place in an area large enough to accommodate a large crowd of several thousand people. On a feast day, devout followers would be expected to spend a significant portion of the day at the Temple. Were the event to have occurred later in the day, or well away from the Temple area, it would have been extremely difficult to have assembled such a significant gathering. G. K. Beale has explored this understanding in *The Descent of the Eschatological Temple in the Form of the Spirit at Pentecost* (63-90). J. H. E. Hull, in *The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles*, quotes F. H. Chase, who proposed that Pentecost occurred in the Temple precinct (Part 1, 56).

Jeremiah and other prophets foretold that when the Lord renewed His Covenant, He would put His Spirit within His people (Jer 31.31-34). He would set His sanctuary in their midst forever, establishing an intimate relationship with them (cf. Heb 8.2-13). It is almost a necessity to have the new chosen community at or near the Temple on the day of Pentecost. This is a positive side of the coming of the Deity; however, there is another side that is less appealing. The Deity will also come, but in theophanies of judgment, which, within a cultic context, can only be fitted with the Temple, or its equivalent (30.27-30; 66.15). Attributing this context of judgment helps to explain the subsequent opposition from the authorities of Jerusalem, as well as the failure to persuade the majority of the Jewish people at home and abroad.

Peter

The coming of the Spirit is not simply about imparting the gift of Languages, but also marks the emergence of Peter as a primary leader in the Christian movement. The portrayal of Peter throughout the synoptic Gospels is uneven, at best. He is often portrayed as impetuous, presumptuous and failing to recognize the major precepts that Jesus wants to convey. He is singled out for rebuke, and his denial of Jesus is recorded in all four accounts. However, all of the accounts also record hints of Peter's future leadership role, and he is considered to be uniquely given a level of authority among the other apostles, based on the words of Christ (Mat 16.17-19). He is the only apostle personally given the keys to the kingdom, in a way that is distinct from the community at large (Mat 18.15-19; John 20.21-23).

One of the first actions by the Eleven in the book of Acts is the selection of Matthias as a replacement for Judas. Luke assigns Peter the task of initiating this effort. As Luke introduces the activity of the Holy Spirit to the Christian community, he portrays Peter as the spokesman for the entire apostolic band. While the other disciples were present, it is through Peter that the miracle of Languages is defended, and the meaning of the event is interpreted for the crowd. From this point onward, he is either leading or present in just about every activity of the apostles until the emergency of Paul. Luke develops the persona of Peter in the first parts of Acts and identifies several aspects of Peter's special authority (Acts 1-12) in order to demonstrate that Paul's apostleship conforms to the same pattern – in particular their imposition of hands conferring the Holy Spirit (Acts 8.15-18, 19.6). In each instance of the Spirit's activities in which Peter is involved, he (Peter), serves as an

authoritative figure: as the miracle worker among the crippled at the Temple, as the judge in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, as the Spirit releaser, the instrument of the Spirit's filling via the imposition of his hands, as an example of suffering for the faith in his imprisonment, and above all, as the interpreter of the Holy Spirit's progress.

Before the day of Pentecost, the focus of the apostles is still on their personal and national future, "Will you restore the kingdom of Israel at this time?" (Acts 1.6)

Jesus answered their question by promising the following:

"...but 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 (v.8).

Here the author establishes the pattern for the career of Peter. He is the only apostle involved in each stage of the opening of the Christian community to new groups: Diaspora Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. Luke's primary interest, however, does not appear to be the career of Peter, but that of Paul. He reinforces Petrine primacy as long as it is necessary to support the emergence of Paul, and his mission to the Gentiles. Throughout Acts, Peter provides the necessary influence to allow acceptance of first the Samaritans, and then the Gentile believers into the new faith, but then his persona quickly fades from the narrative. He only reappears as required to reinforce the activities and decisions of Paul. His authority is established by Luke at Pentecost, to enable him to act as the bridge that will be required to connect the all Jewish assembly in Jerusalem to the pagan world at large, beginning at a city that could symbolize the end of the world to the Jewish people, Caesarea.

Caesarea

The incident at Caesarea is arguably the most crucial event of the book of Acts. While Pentecost is unusual in its setting and development of events, it maintains continuity with the Temple and the life of the nation. Caesarea, to the contrary, ushers in the unthinkable: Gentile followers. Without Pentecost, Caesarea is impossible. It is Peter, with his authority as apostle, (Acts 1.21-22), witness and interpreter of Pentecost, (Acts 2.1-41), who is able to recognize the activity of the Holy Spirit, and the link between this event and that of Pentecost.

The tenor of the context deliberately shows the events as the complete work of the Spirit. Peter is called to the house of a Gentile, through the agency of a dream given to a god-fearer. He is admonished, through a vision, not to be too hasty in judging others. Shortly thereafter, he witnesses Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit:

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the messages. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So He ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10.44-48).

The languages are given to the Gentiles, and this phenomenon compels Peter to call for their baptism/initiation into the community. Luke, as seen before, is very careful to set the acceptance of the Gentiles’ baptism in focus, by referring to Pentecost.

This approval is visible to the six Jewish believers who accompany Peter. Every one present recognizes that this is a major departure from Judaism’s exclusivist self-understanding. In the prior expansion of the community at Pentecost, the new members came with significant cultural ties to the apostles’ faith. The Judeans, the

Diaspora Jews, and, to a certain extent, the Samaritans, all shared the major traditions and rituals of the Twelve. With the Gentile believers, the only links they had were faith itself and the approval of the Holy Spirit.

Luke portrays Peter as explaining that baptism cannot be refused from the new believers, since they received the Holy Spirit “just like us before” (10.47). Without Peter, Cornelius would still be a devout, God-fearing man; however, he could not be a brother (Acts 10.2). Without Pentecost, Luke could not have Peter explain the significance of the sign to the six Jewish believers that were present with him. Gentiles must be baptized, because the Holy Spirit accepts them first. Neither Peter nor the six can deny this fact.

Luke uses the Jerusalem Pentecost as the template for the later ‘Pentecosts’ in his account. Each of these events is initiated with an ‘undeniable’ act of the Holy Spirit, and results in an immediate incorporation of a new group of believers into the Christian assembly. Each Pentecost event is marked by an appearance of the speaking in languages. The responsibility for the occasion is ascribed to God, but this divine action will ultimately lead to a break with Second Temple Judaism (Acts 1.7-8).

Upon returning to the Jerusalem assembly, Peter is required to explain his action to the believers of the circumcision (11.15). Luke repeats Peter’s conclusion about the tenor of the event.

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?

(Acts 11.15-17).

This text is instructive because it repeats in clear terms that the experience at Caesarea, as understood by Peter, is identical to Pentecost. It is extremely difficult to assert, as some authors attempt to do, that these two events are different.

Witherington is hesitant in stressing this point, namely, that Pentecost would be concerned with the languages of the nations and Caesarea with ecstatic languages (156). Luke does not indicate any difference between the two episodes; the passages should normally be read as intentionally paralleled. The two phrases – “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning,” and “So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us” – do not suggest that Peter really meant to say “and of course, it is the same gift except that they, the Gentiles, experienced a different kind of Spiritual languages than we did.” Peter’s argument has its force most evident to the Jewish believers, primarily because they have experienced this precise miracle themselves, and to deny the Spirit’s activity in Caesarea is to deny His actions in their own lives. The assembly is convinced in spite of their preference to avoid Peter’s conclusions.

This acceptance did not sit easily with the Jewish converts, and when the issue of Gentile conversions comes up again, the argument has to be repeated. This point recurs a third time at the Jerusalem conference, when Peter says:

After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them:
“Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the Gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us” (Acts 15.7-8).

The reiteration of Peter’s witness in the whole narrative is a good indication of the importance of Caesarea, and the question arises as to whom the sign is directed. The

ones amazed are the Jewish believers that were with Peter. The ones concerned and criticizing these acts are the circumcised believers in Jerusalem, and they are silenced by the compelling testimony of Peter (Acts 11.2, 18). They can only accept the fact that the Gentiles are fully recognized as brothers and sisters by the sovereign act of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10.45).

In these three instances, Luke portrays Jewish Christians as displaying increasing levels of negativity: from amazement, to criticism, and finally, to contention. The ones contending in the council were converts from the sect of the Pharisees, who believed Peter's report, but still felt that "it is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the Law of Moses" (Sanders 140-2). Their concern is ultimately overridden, and Gentiles are freed from the Law. The problem is that the Jewish Christians were continuing to follow the strict rules of the Law of Moses, and of course, the Gentiles are not.

Luke has set the problem and the solution at the same time. The Holy Spirit has spoken, Peter the apostle has testified, and the pastoral decision had been made. Gentiles will not be circumcised, traditionalists will not accept that, and Jewish Christians will stand in an ambiguous position, facing the decision of the Deity. This state of affairs explains the problems that would surface not only in the book of Acts, (Acts 21.20-25), but also in the Pauline letters (cf. Gal 2.1-14). Luke adeptly develops this narrative with the help of the judicial sign of Languages, in order to answer this thorny issue.

Luke sees Caesarea and the acceptance of Gentiles as the fulcrum of apostolic history. The assembly has opened the door to the Gentile community, making the

office of the ‘Apostle to the Gentiles’ possible. At Caesarea, the disciples of Jesus stop being seen as one of the sects of Judaism and become a divinely-ordained congregation that is set against all the other branches of Judaism as a whole. The Babel Paradox provides the hinge upon which the door to the Gentiles is opened, while those who would hold onto Jewish nature of the faith must adapt or depart. In this instance it is not a group of people who are excluded or rejected, but a culture.

Ephesus

The third instance in the book of Acts of the miracles of Languages continues to fit the pattern established by Luke, although the principle actor is now Paul, rather than Peter. At Jerusalem and Caesarea, the Jewish context of the Pentecost events is obvious, and so their integrative function into the plot of Luke-Acts is fairly straightforward. The Jewish context of the Ephesian Pentecost, however, is more subtle, however, and has led to significant confusion about the meaning of the passage. It is most commonly seen as a less significant passage, concerning an issue of proper baptism. To understand why Luke presents this event as so significant as to warrant the intervention of the Holy Spirit requires a study of the relationship and the perceived dissimilarity between the baptism of John and Christian baptism.

Paul, during his second visit to Ephesus, encounters some disciples (Acts 19.1-7). The text suggests that quickly Paul senses a serious deficiency in the nature of their belief. This leads him to question their status and to ascertain that they are truly Christian disciples. Luke gives what is most likely a compressed record of the essentials of the message of Paul, and yet which was almost certainly a rather

extended theological exposition. Luke portrays Paul as puzzled about their status, and for Chance, the only certainty in this episode is that they become Christians after the Reception of the Holy Spirit (Chance 343). Paul is portrayed as filling up their ignorance of other relevant theological matters that were outside the teachings of John, as if they were ‘first time converts’ (Dunn 256). With this new information, it is probable that they repented. It is only after this that they could commit themselves to Christ and undergo believer’s baptism and, – after the imposition of Paul’s hands – receive the Holy Spirit.

F.F. Bruce argues that, since Luke uses the term “disciples” without qualification, that it must be interpreted that these are Christian disciples (Bruce, 385). Witherington has shown that this argument in itself is by no means conclusive (Witherington, 570). Bruce does not take into account the larger context in which Luke informs his reader that the disciples’ understanding is not consistent with a Christian profession. This deficiency is not trivial at all, and militates against calling them Christians. Paul presupposes of Christians the possession of the Holy Spirit; consequently he does not see these men as Christians. Luke’s text has the teaching of Paul leading them to conversion, baptism, and the reception of the Spirit. They are called disciples, but their beliefs and their persona do not reflect a Christian disposition.

Paul discovered that they did not possess the Holy Spirit or even know of His existence. For that matter, their beliefs did not reflect any real knowledge of the Baptizer’s doctrine either (Stagg 196). His doctrine was premised on individual repentance, and they should have understood it prior to receiving his baptism. At this

point, the Baptizer's invective against the Pharisees coming to baptism without repentance and faith illuminates the text about the prerequisites he considered necessary before it was to be administered: "to produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3.2-18). The question of baptism, as a physical or religious event, is not as important as repentance and its result, a changed life. John refused to baptize the Pharisees because they showed no sense of repentance or evidence of a changed life; they did not possess the Spirit. Moreover, John's message did not stop at baptism, but was incomplete unless it pointed beyond – not to John's persona, but to the coming one who was to baptize with the Spirit and with fire. Chance notes that it is surprising that the Ephesian disciples did not receive the full teaching of John's message (Chance 343). They had a better temperament than the Pharisees, but were essentially in the same situation in relationship with repentance, due to their lack of the Spirit. They described themselves as being 'into the baptism of John' (note that Luke does not say that John baptized them).

This construction is extremely suspicious on two grounds. The first is that an actual follower of John would probably have replied: 'for repentance'" to Paul's question (Pervo, Acts 469). The second is that someone being baptized 'into the baptism of John' might imply that the candidate would be placed in a relationship with the bearer of that name (Pervo, Acts 469). This last observation could imply that in the case of these disciples, they were neither true disciples of John nor of Jesus, but rather were victims of grave doctrinal deviations. The emphasis of their faith could have been the person of John rather on the coming of the Savior which John anticipated (Longenecker 493). Based on their ambiguous and confused answers, it is

unlikely that the Ephesian disciples were truly followers of Christ (lack of the Holy Spirit), or of the Baptizer's message (lack of knowledge of the Holy Spirit or of baptism for repentance). Many Christians have traditionally given the Ephesian Pentecost their own meaning by using an interpretative paradigm that either fails to define clearly the relationship between John's and Jesus' ministries, or in the extreme, dissociates them altogether. .Consequently, a theory of two distinct baptismal rites is imposed on the references in this passage. In this situation, the baptism of John is viewed primarily as an act of preparation, and is therefore considered incomplete. "It was a baptism with water lacking full messianic efficacy," a figure and a preparation for the baptism instituted by Christ, a symbol of the right disposition for the coming kingdom (NCE, 58). In this view, the Christian rite is final, signifying conversion to Christ, and aggregation into the Church. This perspective, over time, led to more emphasis on aggregation than to conversion, ultimately justifying to the conception of a rite that fitted the needs of an all-inclusive institutional church, recruiting its membership predominantly by birth (Mikoski, 142-144). The perceived distinction between the two baptisms has resulted into confusion about the nature of John's baptism, and has tended to obscure the potential of a covenantal dismissal nature in the giving of Languages in the episode of the Ephesians Pentecost (Acts 19.1-7).

This hermeneutical choice is highly anachronistic, and cannot fully account for Luke's perspective of both ministries of John and Jesus. Luke recognizes John as the precursor of the work of the apostles, and sees a difference of degree, though not in nature, between the baptism of John and Christian baptism. John, as well as Jesus, is seen working in the same continuum of prophetic activities (Luke 7.29; John 3.22;

4.2). John is portrayed as yielding to the ascendancy of Jesus (Luke 3.15-18; 7.18-23), and Jesus extols the greatness of John as the last prophet of the old economy (Luke 7.24-35). Both baptisms are preconditioned on repentance and belief (Luke 3.8; Acts 2.37-38; 3.19; 17.30; and especially 26.20). In John's case, baptism is given to repenting adult converts as a preparation for the one to come, while Christian baptism is performed upon adults in response to the finished work of the Christ that John anticipated.

We have at least one example, in the Gospel of John, of the manner this continuum worked in actual practice. Andrew, one of two disciples of the Baptizer, switched his allegiance to Jesus, recognizing Him as the one who completes John's work. Andrew was part of the initial nucleus of Jesus' disciples, and invited Peter to join them (John 1.35,-42). Many of the apostles, like Andrew and Peter, were probably disciples of John before becoming Jesus' disciples, and traveled a similar path. Our text implies that Peter was alert to the potential that the Messiah would appear soon, and was active in the messianic circle of the Baptizer (John 1.29-35, 40, 41; 4.1-2; Acts 1.21-22). This movement of a core of disciples from John to Jesus fulfills the prophecy of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah that John is "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1.15-17, NRSV).

The preceding information shows that our exposition is directed by two major paradigms. The significance of Paul's encounter with some disciples at Ephesus will remain unclear if one does not apply these two crucial interpretative approaches to the Ephesian Pentecost. First is the notion that John's ministry is subsumed by that of Jesus. Second, that there is equivalence of the baptism of John with that of Jesus

(Acts 1.21-22; John 1.40-41). The application of that rite presupposes for John and for Jesus the same meaning about the changed nature of the baptized (Andrew, the only example available to us, began as a disciple of John – which implies his conversion and baptism, and upon transferring this allegiance to Jesus; he did not require re-baptism). The Gospel of Luke presents John and Jesus working at the same time toward calling Israel to repentance. For that matter, the only time the performance of a baptism is recorded in the Gospel of Luke or other Synoptics, it is not Jesus' baptism, but John's. Mark 16.16 and Matthew 28.19b contain the word baptism as instructions, not only as a future occurrence. Luke does not differentiate between a Christian and a Johanine baptism. However, in Acts, Luke distinguishes between the Ephesian followers and Apollos, who was correctly baptized and needed only clarification on the development of the faith. Luke uses the lack of the Spirit motif to highlight the two essential elements of Paul's teaching – repentance and belief in Jesus.

Languages in Ephesus

What is especially intriguing about the Ephesian Pentecost is that for the third time the gift of Languages is given without Luke providing an explanation of its purpose or significance. The shortness of the text does not permit one to simply discard the languages theme as an incidental narrative element, or to treat it as a kind of dramatic prop used to enhance the storyline of Acts. Luke compresses the text to seven verses, and, by including languages, means that they are a significant and necessary part of the overall development of the narrative. The reader, because of the

terseness of the narrative, is faced with the challenge of discovering the meaning of languages in the case of the Ephesian disciples and must refer to the previous episodes of languages in the book of Acts to understand their meaning. At Jerusalem and Caesarea, the purpose for the giving of the gift of the Spirit is apparent: to speak to Israel and also to integrate a new group of believers. Is there something specific in this third situation or the condition of these men that merits this particular expression and meaning?

Luke's interest in this passage appears to be the focus on repentance and conversion. It looks like Luke uses the conversion of these now Christian disciples to remind his audience of the key message of John the Baptizer, namely, repentance. The allusion to John's baptism for repentance is not a simple coincidence, Luke chooses to loop back chapter three of his prior work, to John's ministry and to the Jewish roots of Christianity. He has previously acquainted his audience with John's mission and baptism of repentance by inserting multiple references to John's tradition in the background of his twin work (Luke 1.5-24; 3.2-18; 7.18-33; 9.7-9; 11.1; 16.16; 20.4-6; Acts 1.5, 21-22; 10.37; 11.16; 13.24-25; 18.25). With this overwhelming number of references about the life and mission of John, the author appears to suggest that the Christian movement which he chronicles is the heir of John's work. Furthermore, before the Ephesians episode Paul is presented – like Peter was (Acts 1.5, 21-22; 10.37; 11.16) – as being well acquainted with John's baptism of repentance. Luke portrays him as having integrated this teaching within his own (Acts 13.24-25). Paul's authority has been established by Luke well before the

Ephesian encounter, having demonstrated his ability and authority to diagnose the disciples' deficiency in regard to John's teaching about repentance and the Messiah.

The identity of the Ephesian disciples can be inferred to be Jewish, by virtue of their religious profession. Even if they do not know much about John's message, they were identified with Israel and thus their situation was only applicable to the Jewish nation (Luke 7.18-35). If that were not the case, Luke would have needed to note their Gentile status. Luke further emphasizes the Jewish context by telling us that immediately afterwards, Paul enters the synagogue and teaches there for three months. Once the Jewish context of Acts 19.1-7 is recognized, it opens the Babel Paradox as a possible interpretation of this event. For the Paradox to be operative, a movement of the Deity, a Jewish context, and a dichotomy of motives are needed. The Ephesian disciples were included, but who or what is rejected?

This setting of this event in Ephesus, a leading city of the Diaspora, is significant for this occurrence of languages also bears John's warning of impending judgment, namely, the baptism of fire (Luke 3.8-9). Note that the gift of Languages is portrayed as being given to twelve Jews. It is only now that Luke mentions their number, which has always carried special significance to Israel. These twelve may stand for Israel in the Diaspora. Luke treats Ephesus, the main city of Asia, as the last hope of Israel to embrace the message of Paul. This message is now being proclaimed to the Diaspora Jews among whom Paul has been working, since he was the bearer of the Gospel to the Jews first, not solely the apostle to the Gentiles. Like the disciples, Israel of the Diaspora is called with the message of John to repent, to believe, and to escape the wrath of the *Eschaton* – that is, the culmination of God's

plans, the end time. Luke's use is consistent with the Pauline purpose of languages as a sign and a warning to unbelievers.

After initially welcoming Paul into their synagogue, the Jewish opposition forced him to leave with his followers and to move to the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19.9). Here Paul expanded the scope of his ministry, "so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19.10 NRSV). Unfortunately, the traditionalists of the Diaspora, as represented by those of Ephesus, refused to embrace the message of Paul, and John (Shallis 55). From this point on, Luke does not portray Paul as preaching in another Jewish synagogue. The sign of Languages, with its negative message of covenantal dismissal, is discharged for the third time, and provides the final warning to the entire nation – the Jewish people of Eretz Israel, of the Judaic Christians, and finally of the Diaspora (Jervell, 49). The Pauline mission in Ephesus and Asia comes to an end, and Paul prepares to go to Jerusalem, setting his eyes on the city of Rome (Acts 19.22).

Negative Themes Associated with Pentecost

In each of his three Pentecost accounts, Luke has used languages to make the point that Israel of the Second Temple was not in accord with the Eschaton. Luke intimates that God is writing new chapters in History through the person of Jesus and the apostles, and that Israel as a nation is tragically missing the invitation offered by John the Baptizer to enter in the kingdom of God, or more exactly to become the kingdom of God.

This failure of Israel requires an explanation. Languages are used to indicate the displeasure of the Deity towards Israel, while justifying the Christian missionary enterprise. The plot of Acts requires that there is an open opportunity for not just individuals, but also national repentance, while the threat of a retribution and exile remains imminent. Luke's application of languages serves a dual purpose of integration and separation. They are used by Luke to legitimate the addition of all, Jew or non-Jew, into the community. Languages function primarily as a sign of separation through Deuteronomy's curse of Languages (28.49 ff). In spite of their importance to the subplot of every scene in which they were introduced, languages lack the mythical and spiritual efficiency (they indicate only a future impending judgment) to provide a definitive account of rupture between the Deity and Israel. Some other device needed to be used. Luke, in order to exploit their judicial implication must also provide a list of violations or infractions that are to be adjudicated and thus 'confirm' the implication/legitimizing of using the curse of Deuteronomy.

Negative elements of impenitent behavior and willful indifference are employed by the author to pursue a systematic devaluation of those who oppose the messengers of Jesus. Luke's Gospel describes various stories, sayings, and parables. The gist of these is remarkably related to the incomprehensibility and covenantal dismissal aspects of languages. It is not coincidental that even a cursory reading of the Gospel reveals that these themes take second place only after the persona and mission of Jesus. There are approximately twenty four apparently negative passages. The following list presents those in their chronological order in the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 2.34-35	Simeon prediction that many will fall in Israel.
Luke 4.14-30	Jesus' rejection at Nazareth.
Luke 7.29-30	Pharisees rejected the kingdom of God by refusing John's baptism.
Luke 8.4-15	The parable of the Sower.
Luke 9.21-22	Rejection by the authorities of Israel.
Luke 9.44-45	The theme of concealment of understanding.
Luke 10.8-16	Day of Judgment for those refusing the Gospel like Chorazin.
Luke 10.20-24	The divine motive of enlightenment for the disciples.
Luke 11.29-32	The sign of Jonah to Nineveh and the queen of the South.
Luke 11.37-53	Woes upon the Pharisees.
Luke 12.10	The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.
Luke 13.6-9	The parable of the fig tree.
Luke 13.22-29	The narrow door and the weeping and gnashing of teeth.
Luke 13. 34-35	The lament over Jerusalem.
Luke 14.15-24	The parable of the supper.
Luke 16.14-15	Pharisees being an abomination in the sight of God.
Luke 18.34	The disciples blinded by God.
Luke 19.27	The slaying of the enemies of the king.
Luke 19.41-44	The destruction of Jerusalem and its blindness.
Luke 20.9-17	The parable of the vineyard.
Luke 20.17-18	The stone of stumbling of Isaiah 8.14.
Luke 20.45-47	A greater condemnation for the scribes.
Luke 23.27-31	Lament of Jesus on Jerusalem women.
Luke 24.13-35	The concealment of the Emmaus disciples understanding.

These texts constitute the underpinning of a covenantal reading of Acts. The theme of *judgment* is quantitatively the most important. The opponents of Jesus – High Priests, Priests, Kings, Pharisee, Sadducees, Scribes and all who reject the witness of Jesus or are party to the crucifixion of the Messiah – will be judged ruthlessly and will not reach the kingdom of Heaven preached by John the Baptizer and Jesus. The sheer number of these stories and parables indicate Luke's preoccupation with judgment of the authorities of Israel and at least portions of the people. These passages resonate with the dismissal nature of the three Pentecosts' languages to such an extent that it significantly strengthens their legitimacy and plausibility as indicating an overarching theme in the structure of Acts. The use of

languages provides a warning of coming judgment, while the adjudication themes provide the rationalization for the verdict itself. The cumulative strength of these passages creates a sense of the alienation of Israel from Jesus and his followers, one that is consistent with the judicial element of languages. At the same time, it builds up a background in which languages find their *raison d'être*.

Among many of the judgment passages, Luke has inserted an additional concept, occultation – the intentional obscuring or concealment of a message. Luke sees God as exercising His prerogative to either illuminate or blind humanity, including the people of Israel. The blinding may be the result of the cumulative rejections of the subject, or simply the sovereign act of the Deity. The passage that most clearly illustrates the occultation concept is the parable of the Sower. Jesus, in explaining it, informs the disciples that they are given the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven but those from the outside are barred from understanding and even knowing its existence (Luke 8.4-15). Luke, in this occasion, has Jesus take for Himself the mandate of the prophet Isaiah, “Though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand” (8.10). This parable and quotation indicates a willful occultation of the message of life that leads ultimately to the salvation of those enlightened and the perdition of those shut out from the light and truth of Jesus’ message.

This occultation is incongruent with and clashes forcefully against the Jesus persona, whose avowed mission consists principally of giving sight to the blind, both literally and spiritually (Luke 4.18; 7.21-22; 14.13; 14.21; 18.35). This would be an intractable contradiction, if one does not consider the attitude of Jesus in this passage

in light of the Babel Paradox. Luke gives enough other texts of blindness being cured that it appears to identify this parable as a turning point in the Gospel, initiating a state of blindness on Israel concerning Jesus and His mission. Luke from the beginning has the Messiah's mission serving a double purpose. Its positive side is seen in the enlightenment provided to the disciples and His followers, while on the negative side there is the blinding and perdition of the masses that reject Him.

Luke, in his Gospel, not only refers to the prophetic tradition of occultation in the Hebrew Scriptures, applying it to Jesus' relations to the people of Israel, but he also builds a parallel case right at the beginning of his Gospel, as portrayed in the young Jesus' relationship with his parents. Mary and Joseph are aware of the miraculous conception of Jesus and of the prophecies given concerning their child; although they still do not understand His mission (Luke 2.50-51; Laurentin 168). This theme will be expanded when Luke portrays Jesus hiding the real nature of His mission from, even the Twelve, who experience occurrences of both occultation and enlightenment (Luke 9.44; 10.20; 18.34; 24.13-35).

Acts constantly builds upon this Gospel insight, and these two themes are present from the beginning of the work all the way to the recorded conclusions of the public ministries of the apostles of Jesus. Peter is seen as firing the first salvo, "With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation'" (Acts 2.40). On the occasion after the resurrection that the assembly of Jesus' disciples was presented to Israel, Luke indicates that all Jews of Eretz Israel and the Diaspora are summoned urgently to believe that Jesus was crucified for the sins of the nation as well as for the whole world, and that He is the

Messiah of Israel (O'Reilly 96). The message of the Eschaton had not been acted upon by the traditionalist camp; its opposition grew progressively fiercer against the new faith – ultimately reaching the point of physically persecuting the apostles. Stephen's martyrdom was the pretext for what could be seen as a vexing recapitulation of the past violations of Israel's Covenant with her God, which led to the Exile, followed by the ferocious accusation that this generation was repeating the idolatry and blasphemy of their ancestors (Act 7.51-53).

Luke's purpose is twofold. He highlights unrepentant individuals' sins while also indicting the covenanted nation through allusions to the Exile in Babylonia. Throughout the book of Acts (with few exceptions like at Berea and the first phase of the Ephesian ministry), Luke portrays the message of Jesus as being cast off in a similar spirit of abhorrence by the traditionalists of Eretz Israel (Jerusalem), and soon, the Diaspora (Ephesus), thus leaving the hope of reconciliation applicable only to the individual person who happens to accept the message (Raisanen, 101).

From Ephesus to Rome

In the second part of Acts, as Paul is portrayed evangelizing the Diaspora, Luke interweaves references of repentance and judgment within the narrative. He has utilized languages to reiterate John the Baptizer's call for repentance and faith, as well as to remind the reader that the kingdom of God, Israel's birthright, is still near at hand and that judgment is coming upon those who do not repent. Unhappily, as the evangelization of the Diaspora progresses, traditionalists from the synagogues of almost every city of the Diaspora are portrayed displaying the same antagonism as

those of Eretz Israel. The stories of violent rejection and deadly opposition are used by Luke to build a powerful indictment of the traditionalists' position, as well as providing the justification for their consequence – the Turning to the Gentiles (Acts 13.51, 18.6; 28.28).

Paul's threefold pronouncements, as presented by Luke, of a Turn toward the Gentiles are a vexing and hotly debated point among scholars. Declaring more than once that he would 'go to the Gentiles,' why would he continue to give priority to evangelizing the Jews? Diverging opinions attempt to explain this contradiction. These positions do not typically recognize the clues present in Luke's Gospel of the covenantal meaning of languages. They typically misread the repetition of the turning to the Gentiles as vignettes of little importance or as having a local and temporal significance.

Luke's continued insistence on turning to the Gentiles is not a matter of a writer's dereliction. The importance of this theme is highlighted by its triadic structure and its positioning within the narrative. Luke develops the conflict of traditionalists and Christians along the line of a seemingly unavoidable confrontation through this scheme. Luke presents Paul's desire to reach his nation, but that he is unable to overcome their obstinate refusal. The quasi-national refusal of Israel to accept the proffered Kingdom of God triggers the Turn to the Gentiles.

Luke details this turning as the consequence of the opposition against Paul at both Antioch of Pisidia and later Corinth (Acts 13.46-51; 18:6-7). According to Luke, the initial proclamation of freedom in Christ in Antioch was received favorably, "but, when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and

blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul.” He admonished the scoffers in the crowd with, “Beware, therefore, that what the prophets said does not happen to you.” Paul’s responses to his traditionalist opponents emphasized that this offer was still open to them, but now includes Gentiles as well (Acts 13.51, 18.6; 28.28).

Luke uses this animosity against Paul and Barnabas to weave three threads together. First, an indictment; “Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life,” Luke makes clear that the turning to the Gentiles would not happen without the traditionalists rejecting the message of God. Secondly, as a consequence of their rejection of God, they will not inherit the promise of faith in Christ, and nor will they have any part in the kingdom. Thirdly, Luke has the apostles confirm their mandate by quoting Isaiah: “I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth,” thus establishing for themselves the role of the new divinely accredited messengers to the Gentiles, which the people of Israel had failed to fulfill (Isa 42.6-7).

At Corinth, this same disastrous process was repeated. Paul was opposed by traditionalists, and Luke reports “He shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, ‘your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’” Telling your opponents this is not exactly reflective of an open, conciliatory offer of salvation. In this text, Luke refers back to Jesus’ order to shake off the dust of one’s feet against an unrepentant household or city found in Luke 9.4-5. This passage is linked thematically (the commissioning of the Twelve and the Seventy are twin passages) with Jesus condemnation of the unrepentant cities and

people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Luke 10.5-16). It is significant that at Corinth, Luke has Paul depart in this fashion not only from the people, but also from the synagogue, as if to show that the message can no longer be contained only by the local synagogue. This shaking of dust implies the death and removal from Israel's Covenant to those to whom it is directed (Nielsen 87).

Rome

At Rome, which for Luke uses symbolically as 'the ends of the world', the situation worsens (Dupont 19). Luke describes a much more pacific meeting than his description of the Antiochian and Corinthian altercations. Somewhat surprisingly, after a more 'diplomatic' and cautious answer from the Roman Jews, and their muffled response to the Gospel, Paul, aggressively, and for the third time, repeats his intention to turn to the Gentiles.

Luke intentionally places completion of his Turn to the Gentiles' triad at the end of his twin work, and makes Paul pronounce a statement that is seemingly out of place and out of character. Like Jesus in Luke's Gospel, Paul's actions are completely contrary to his mandate to open the eyes of his hearers (Acts 26.15-18). He harshly appropriates Isaiah's prophecy of blinding and unbelief and applies it to what is otherwise a peaceful meeting. This is reminiscent of Jesus' interpretation of the parable of the Sower. Paul's outburst has been an intractable hermeneutic quandary, but one which the Babel Paradox can help to explain. Luke uses the identical passage that Jesus cites, but he selects a longer quotation from Isaiah six. This longer excerpt includes "go to this people" which Luke aims at Paul's lukewarm

audience (Acts 28.26). Paul is portrayed delivering a scathing denunciation and hammering his audience, and by extension, the nation with a divine judgment of obfuscation. Isaiah's prophecy is utilized in order to recall the sins of Israelite ancestors, and to implicate the descendants of this people with the same sins, and the same condemnation as their forefathers (Tyson, Image177-8).

The Lucan Paul that quotes Isaiah 6.9-10 is the same one known for his strong teaching of covenantal dissolution through language in First Corinthians (I Cor 14.21; Isa. 28.11). His prophetic speech is the climax of the twin work, and draws together the themes of judgment and occultation, the covenantal dismissal of languages and Paul's Gentile mission. Luke portrays the Holy Spirit seizing Paul, who is acting here as a prophet, foretelling that the turn from the Traditionalists to the Gentiles is definitive (covenantal dismissal), and that the Kingdom of God will be principally composed of Gentiles, without the majority of the people of Second Temple Israel (Pervo, Acts 485; Litwak 184-5).

It is after the Jews of Rome part ways with Paul's message that Luke makes the apostles of the Gentiles utter the startling conclusion of the twin work (Stagg 265; Bovon 188). Luke divides this prophetic episode into two distinct focuses. The full quotation of Isaiah's prophecy speaks of the judgment and desolation of the land of Israel and the exile of her people. Although Luke only quotes a portion of this passage, the reference arches back to the legacy of the Hebrew Scripture and in particular the distressing message of Isaiah for his people (Acts 28.27-27; Isa 6.9-10, 11-13; Bovon 494). The axe is at the root of the tree (Luke 3.9) Luke's second focus is more positive, he contrasts Isaiah's prophecy with Paul's which anticipates that,

beyond Israel, the Gentiles will be the future of God's work among the nations (Litwak 181-2).

While Paul's denunciation of the blindness of his audience appears vitriolic, and has been used as a justification for the persecution of later European Jews, the force of his words is not directed at those who are already blind, as much as those who have refused to declare a position. Those who have been blinded by God cannot be held responsible for their failure to see (cf. Rom 11.25-31). The thrust of his argument is that there are still many traditionalists who are not yet completely blind; they must be moved from their complacency (cf. Rom 11.14-15), their belief that they are free to avoid a commitment now will still lead to blindness in the end. Paul's energy is directed at converting as many of his own people (Rom 9.2-5) as he possibly can; permitting them to believe that they can avoid making a decision is not a kindness to them. In the decision between their tradition and their God, there is not a middle position.

Paul's condemnation is aimed at the traditionalist position, and the cultural phenomenon that is Judaism, not the individual Jewish adherent, whom he is seeking to convert. Evans has emphasized this point against Sanders (208). It is a discernable pattern in many of the criticisms directed toward "the Jews" in Luke/Acts. This is especially apparent in Ephesus, as was noted earlier. Unfortunately, this is a difference that can only be seen from the wider context of the writings of Luke and Paul; this distinction cannot be spotted in the text of the individual passages. The message was easily misrepresented, and its erroneous application difficult to combat.

Luke's Surprising Ending

The ending appears incomplete and leaves the reader dangling. The incongruity at the conclusion of the book, with Paul's shocking prophetic condemnation raises the question: What does this mean? An invaluable insight is found in Tyson's discussion of the Antiochian incident (Acts chapter 13). Although Paul's declaration of the gospel has met with real success, Paul utters his first rejection of Jews as a whole. Tyson notes that "The implied reader is required to de-emphasize Jewish acceptance. The movement of the narrative has been from an initial acceptance of Paul's message by some Jews and god-fearers to a final rejection by the 'Jews'" (140). Until the end of Acts, Luke has not yet given a definitive resolution of these enigmatic issues because they are cumulative elements of a rejection process, ending in Rome, that depicts traditionalists as completely indifferent to the Holy Spirit's message (142, 148). It is only now that the story line, from the beginning of the Lucan Gospel to the end of Acts uncovers its real nature. Paradoxically, it is here that the function of the three Pentecost languages is revealed. From the Gospel of Luke, the reader is already familiar with the topics of judgment, occultation, and the opening to the Gentiles (2.32; 4.25-27). All these themes are repeated in Acts and resonate extremely well with Acts' use of languages identified as a sign to Eretz Israel, the half-convinced Jerusalem Christians, and the Diaspora

Luke must cap the twin work on a largely negative note, with the ominous last occurrence of turning to the Gentiles, in order to keep the meaning of covenantal dismissal. It is necessary to do so because, in this new framework, languages still retain the significance of judgment of the Israelite people through an

incomprehensible foreign language, found in the Hebrew Scriptures. While to modern readers the ending is incomplete, the first century reader will recognize that Luke has completed his argument.

In a polemic work, it is common to sum up the threads of your argument in your conclusion (Denova, 225). The closing verses of the work contain a number of elements that serve this purpose for Luke. Paul has arrived in Rome; the hero of the work has achieved a lifelong goal. He enters under house arrest however, rather than triumphantly. Those who would be assigned the role of the prosecution admit that they have no real case against him, but express concern that the views he represents are “spoken against everywhere” (cf. Acts 28.22). Paul presents a comprehensive argument, “from morning to evening,” convincing some, but failing to move the majority. He applies the Isaiah quote to their response, accusing them of blindness. The promises of God offered to all are rejected by them, but remain open to the Gentile world. Under house arrest, Paul is nevertheless free to continue to pursue his ministry among them, unhindered.

Symbolically, Luke has shown Paul travel to the ends of the world in a Jewish context, at great personal cost, seeking to bring his nation to repentance before God. Rome is also the symbolic heart of the Gentile world, and the apostolic work to them continues. Paul himself had been blind to the claims of Jesus before losing his sight on the Damascus road; he both recognizes and empathizes with the affliction he diagnoses in his co-religionists. Luke’s work is to justify the Pauline decision to leave the traditions of his people and his declaration of freedom from the Mosaic Law. He has frequently portrayed traditionalists among Jews as annoyed by and

unreceptive to the Christian message, using the concepts of judgment and occultation to legitimize the traditionalists' refusal to embrace the new faith. To their defense it must be said that Luke propounds what would have been a stream of outrageous beliefs.

Luke is attempting to build a case that appears to be almost oxymoronic, that Gentiles and Samaritans are included by faith in the 'authentic' Judaism, which the nation has rejected. Luke goes even further in believing that Gentiles can participate in the fellowship of Israel without the prerequisites of circumcision and obedience to dietary regulation. These beliefs are extremely difficult to accept from the standpoint of a traditional Judaism that sees herself as the sole recipient of God's Laws. The theme of languages was used to validate the separation between Christians and traditionalists, while simultaneously providing an evidence of the divine approval upon the followers of the new faith. The traditionalist position cannot be accommodated in this new system, the choice is either to accept the *Bat-qol*, abandoning tradition, or to cling to the Law of Moses and completely reject the 'undeniable' movement of God (Raisanen, 101).

Luke has addressed his combined work to Theophilus, a 'lover of God' (Denova, 226). Acting as the author/prophet he addressed the Jewish members of his audience through Paul by using covenantal themes containing warnings of judgment and exile. Luke has used languages as a device to show the way and assist Theophilus in choosing a side in this parting of the ways, the divorce of Pauline Christians from Judaism. Luke's surprising ending is in fact a real conclusion, with his threefold turning to the Gentiles; the divorce certificate has been issued. Luke has not been

writing a history of the apostle Paul or the birth of the church after all, but an apologetic for the Christian faith. The message of the Babel Paradox has been delivered and the choice left to Theophilus is clear. Luke does not tell the reader what to choose; the way is still open to accept the movement of God and the message of Jesus but the consequences had been clearly spelled out as well. The ultimate conclusion is up to the reader.

Conclusion

The foundational premise of this thesis is that the Old Testament contains a theme of languages within it, which is linked to concepts of warning and judgment. These elements are first associated with violations of God's order at Babel, or covenantal violations by the nation of Israel. This is not a new discovery; these verses have been used by both sides in denominational disputes to justify their positions on the meaning and purpose of languages. What is not commonly recognized however is the paradoxical ends these themes have been applied to, and that these recurrent elements work together in a coherent fashion. In proposing the application of our Babel Paradox, we have anticipated that four elements will be present in a passage; an undeniable act of God, a Jewish audience or context, judgment or punishment and paradoxical results or goals.

Luke/Acts has presented a number of interpretive challenges to modern scholars attempting to discern the author's purpose. We have proposed that Luke intentionally incorporated the elements of the Babel Paradox within his narration, and his first century audience would have recognized them, and understood their

meaning. This has yielded reasonable explanations for problematic passages which other interpretive schemes were unable to resolve. Proponents of the rejection, supplement and complement theories each identify major elements of Luke's work to be reconciled, and as was noted earlier, are not either entirely contradictory nor decisive. We believe that this thesis fits most comfortably as an extension of the Complement position, synthesizing the rejection and supplement theories. The best interpretation of Luke/Acts is that the Jewish faith has been supplanted by the ministry of her Messiah, and the ethnic Jew and the Greek are both welcome to follow Him. The break between the religious systems is total, but the possibility remains that not all adherents of the traditionalist view have been blinded and the way open for them to join the new believers.

It will never be possible to go back and determine conclusively all the purposes that Luke hoped to accomplish in writing his work. The strength of this thesis is that it provides a stronger and more complete accounting of the central issues involved than alternate approaches. Additionally, its ability to explain or connect seemingly unrelated issues within the work increases our confidence in the final conclusions. The Babel Paradox provides an explanation for the existing linkage between Pentecost, Babel and Sinai in both Christian and Jewish traditions. The story of Rabbi Eliezer's banishment could fit reasonably as Second Century counterargument to Babel Paradox as presented by Luke at Pentecost. The use of languages is found to be used consistently in Acts, and is found to be congruent with both existing Old Testament themes and the writings of Paul. The position and nature

of the Ephesian Pentecost is clarified. The enigmatic conclusion to the book is explained.

The conclusions of this thesis affect several fields of Biblical studies. It expands our understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures of Israel and her God as seen through the prophetic point of view, especially the neglected theme of God speaking death and exile to His people through an incomprehensible language. This principle is an integral part of the prophetic corpus. It is well attested, and we can even chart its evolution in three distinct phases within the Hebrew Scriptures which lead up to Luke's adaptation in Luke-Acts. It functions first as a primeval icon of God's judgment of humanity (the Tower of Babel). In the second phase, it is altered, becoming a judicial element of a religious contract between Israel and her God (one of the covenantal curse in Deuteronomy). Finally, it metamorphoses into prophecies elucidating the exile of both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah for the prophetic institution of Israel.

The foremost benefit for New Testament Studies of this thesis is that it provides a synthesis of the competing theories for the purpose of the book of Acts. The placement and significance of conflicting and apparently contradictory narrative elements are explained and given a solid hermeneutical framework. What were considered disjoint texts such as the choosing of Mathias, the Samaritan episode and the enigmatic end of Acts combine to form a coherent narrative of covenantal dismissal. By uncovering of the Jewish context of New Testament texts, (Acts Chapters 2, 10, 19, 28; I Cor 14), common anachronistic misinterpretations can be corrected. It also confirms Marylyn Salmon and Rebecca Denova's opinion and of

other scholars that Luke-Acts is thoroughly Jewish. This situates these texts in their cultural and religious milieu and potentially bears on our understanding of the dating of Luke-Acts.

This conclusion absolutely undercuts any interpretation that holds the author of Acts to be anti-Semitic, or that the work can be used to justify Christian anti-Semitism. By contributing a strong theoretical input into the debate concerning the question of discontinuity of Judaism and Christianity, this conclusion also addresses the theses of an adversarial Luke towards the Jewish people especially from the point of view of Jack T. Sanders and Michael Cook. Luke's position is in fact adversarial toward the traditionalists in either the Jewish or Christian communities. Individuals of either viewpoint are not to be persecuted but to be enlightened.

New Testament Studies also benefit from the application of the Babel Paradox to the mentions of incomprehensible languages in Acts. They cease to be a minor element, a prop of the plot, but become the motor of the primary argument in the book. This adaptation is presented as a divinely decreed necessity, allowing the inclusion of Gentiles into the fellowship of Israel. It shows Luke, still retaining the prophetic connotation of incomprehensibility as a sign of judgment and exile, expanding its meaning and transforming it into a multifaceted phenomenon. Luke can provide a rationale for the fall of Israel and its exile and at the same time explain the scarcity of Jewish believers in the rank of a faith supposed to be a continuation of the people of God.

Above all, the hope of the author is that this thesis will help readers to elucidate various misunderstandings concerning the nature and structure of the book

of Acts, as well as the function of the first century gift of Languages. The Babel Paradox was understood as a warning of the covenantal demise of the Second Temple Israel, the judgment foretold to this Israel has already occurred, and so the warnings of her demise are obsolete. It is to be hoped that this will lead to improved clarity in the teaching of themes of Acts, and prove helpful to individuals studying the book.

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