

Spirit-Baptised Creation: Locating Pentecost in the Meta-Narrative of Creation and its Implications for a Pentecostal Ecology

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Introduction

The pentecostal understanding of the baptism of the Spirit has traditionally been framed around the individual, as it is often described in language concerning the individual believer and their salvation. Pentecostal scholarship has often encouraged pentecostalism to envision this Spirit baptism in broader more communal ways.¹ For example, Frank D. Macchia argues that Spirit baptism is the “very substance of the church’s life in the Spirit,” and so should be conceived of as both an individual and communal experience.² That is, Spirit baptism is not only an individual experience, but also important to the church’s unity and cohesion, and so it is communal as well as individual.

However, there are a small but growing group of Pentecostal scholars that argue Spirit baptism can, and in fact should, be understood in a broader way, so that Spirit baptism is envisioned as ecological as well as individual and communal. For example, Shane Clifton argues from Psalm 139:7-9 that all of creation is “Spirit filled”, which could provide a foundation for a Pentecostal ecology.³ Likewise, Matthew Tallman notes the growing trend for incorporating all of creation into pneumatological considerations, focussing mainly on the work of Jürgen Moltmann, Clark Pinnock, and Sigurd Bergmann.⁴ Wolfgang Vondey has also suggested that the narrative of Pentecost “challenges the church to engage with this gift [for] all of creation,” citing Acts 2:17 as the basis of this “challenge.”⁵ These scholars have suggested that Spirit baptism is ecological as well as communal and individual.

The most developed argument has come from A J. Swoboda, who connects a care for creation with four of pentecostalism’s pneumatological emphasises; Spirit baptism, charismatic

¹ Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

² Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 156.

³ Shane Clifton, “Preaching the ‘Full Gospel’ in the Context of Global Environmental Crises,” in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, ed. Amos Yong (Eugene: Pickwick, 2009), 130-31.

⁴ Matthew Tallman, “Pentecostal Ecology: A Theological Paradigm for Pentecostal Environmentalism,” in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, ed. Amos Yong (Eugene: Pickwick, 2009), 144-49.

⁵ Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*, Systematic Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology, ed. Wolfgang Vondey and Daniela C. Augustine (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 105.

communities, healing, and eschatology.⁶ When addressing an ecological understanding of the baptism of the Spirit, Swoboda notes two things; this understanding of the Spirit “baptising” is not found in the Hebrew Bible, and the Hebrew Bible has a more developed connection between the spirit God and creation than the New Testament.⁷ This leads Swoboda to connect the New Testament’s language of the baptism of the Spirit with the Hebrew Bible’s strong connection between the spirit of God and creation through Paul’s use of the Pentecost Psalm (Ps 68) in Ephesians 4:7-11.⁸ As many scholars see the description of the ascending one filling the universe (Eph 4:11) to describe Pentecost, Swoboda argues that this should encourage pentecostals to extend the baptism of the Spirit to all of creation.⁹

In this article, I seek to build upon the work of these scholars by arguing that all of creation can and should be understood as baptised in the Spirit. I will establish the ecological breadth of Spirit baptism by locating Pentecost in the meta-narrative of creation, through the various allusions to the temple in Acts 2. This article will have three parts; an outline of the argument for seeing Pentecost as a temple inauguration theophany (Part One), which connects Pentecost to the meta-narrative of creation (Part Two) and leads to two further exegetical questions on the imagery of creation in Acts 2 (Part Three). This article will finish with a reflection on the theological implications of this ecological reading of Pentecost for a pentecostal ecology.

1. The Pentecost Theophany as a Temple Inauguration Theophany

While the majority of Lukan scholars have used the lens of Israel’s New Exodus (or related phrases like restoration or cleansing) for understanding the Spirit in Luke-Acts to fruitful effect, there remains limitations to this lens’ usefulness for understanding the theophanic imagery of Acts 2:1-4.¹⁰ Scholarship has focussed on the possible parallel between the theophany at Sinai (and the subsequent Mosaic covenant and giving of the law) and the Pentecost theophany.¹¹ However, the Pentecost-Sinai parallel has not been widely accepted, as, among other things, one of the major limitations of this parallel is its inability to interpret the more unique elements of the Pentecost theophany (Acts 2:1-4) and in particular the

⁶ A. J. Swoboda, *Tongues and Trees: Towards a Pentecostal Ecological Theology*, JPTSS vol. 40 (Dorset: Deo, 2013), 192-237.

⁷ Swoboda, *Tongues and Trees*, 197-98.

⁸ Swoboda, *Tongues and Trees*, 198-99.

⁹ Swoboda, *Tongues and Trees*, 200-04.

¹⁰ For those that use the lens of Israel’s New Exodus, see Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2000); Matthias Wenk, *Community-Forming Power: The Socio-Ethical Role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Ju Hur, *A Dynamic Reading of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

¹¹ See for example, Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 46; Turner, *Power from on High*, 279-89; Wenk, *Community-Forming Power*, 246-51; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AYBC (London: Yale University Press, 2007), 233-234.

phrase “tongues as of fire” (Acts 2:3).¹² However, it is the contention of this article, that choosing a different lens—that of the temple inauguration theophanies—can produce a fruitful reading of the Pentecost theophany, and in particular the unique phrase “tongues as of fire”, which can then inform our understanding of the rest of the Pentecost narrative.¹³

1.1 The Pentecost Theophany

The phrase “tongues as of fire” is not used in the wider Greco-Roman literature, leading Glen Menzies to suggest that this is Luke’s translation of a Semitic source.¹⁴ The closest parallels come in the Jewish literature, with Isaiah 30:27-29, 1 Enoch 14:8-25, 71:5 and 1Q29 using the language of “tongues” and “fire,” with each of these having a clear connection to the temple.¹⁵

In Isaiah 30:27-30, Isaiah describes YHWH returning to the temple in Jerusalem to defend the people of Judah.¹⁶ This return of YHWH brings destruction upon the enemies of Judah, as YHWH’s tongue is a consuming fire (Isaiah 30:27), and YHWH’s spirit (LXX: πνεῦμα) rushes up to their neck (30:28). As “the name of the Lord” has strong connection to the temple,¹⁷ the picture developed in verse 27 describes YHWH returning to the temple to defend it and the people of Judah, with a tongue of fire proceeding out of the temple to consume the enemies of Judah. As G. K. Beale notes, this passage is the closest linguistic parallel we have in the LXX to the language of “tongues as of fire.”¹⁸ This “tongue as a consuming fire” is also linked to the spirit of God, as YHWH’s destructive judgement on the enemies of Judah is described as YHWH’s breath—following the mouth metaphors of lips and tongue—consumes Judah’s enemies. Therefore, Isaiah 30:27, which contains the closest linguistic parallel in the LXX to the language of “tongues as of fire,” describes YHWH returning to the temple to defend Judah, with the tongue of YHWH proceeding from the temple like a consuming fire.

¹² For the inadequacy of the Sinai motif for the phrase “tongues as of fire”, see Heidrun Gunkel, Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, and John R. Levison, “Plutarch and Pentecost: An Exploration in Interdisciplinary Collaboration,” in *The Holy Spirit, Inspiration, and the Cultures of Antiquity*, ed. Jörg Frey and John R. Levison (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 66-72. For the broader limitations of the Sinai lens, see Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered For Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 189-201.

¹³ The one other scholar that has explored this lens is G. K. Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple in the Form of the Spirit at Pentecost: Part 1: The Clearest Evidence,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 56, no. 1 (2005): 73-102; G. K. Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple in the Form of the Spirit at Pentecost: Part 2: Corroborating Evidence,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 56, no. 2 (2005): 63-90.

¹⁴ Glen Menzies, “Pre-Lucan Occurrences of the Phrase ‘Tongue(s) of Fire’,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 22, no. 1 (2000): 60.

¹⁵ Menzies, “Pre-Lucan Occurrences,” 27-60; G. K. Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple: The Clearest Evidence,” 84-86.

¹⁶ YHWH is said to return, which is either a return in time or space (from a far). A possible reading of Isaiah 30:27 could be a return of YHWH in time, as in Isaiah 30:18, the people of Judah are instructed to wait, indicating the return of YHWH is connected to time and not necessarily location. For a comment on this, see Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 527.

¹⁷ Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple,” 84.

¹⁸ Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple,” 86-87.

Closer linguistic parallels are present in 1 Enoch 14:8-25, which describes Enoch ascending to the heavenly temple, with this heavenly temple being built on and with tongues of fire.¹⁹ As Enoch enters the temple, he sees the outer court surrounded by tongues of fire (14:9-10) and likewise, when Enoch peers into the Holy of Holies, its foundation is tongues of fire (14:15). Indeed, the γλῶσσαις πυρὸς in 1 Enoch 14:9 & 15 is the closest linguistic parallel to the γλῶσσαι ὡσεὶ πυρὸς in Acts 2:3 that we have in Jewish literature.²⁰ This idea is repeated again in 1 Enoch 71:5, where Enoch sees a temple like structure build on crystals and “tongues of living fire.” In this context, tongues of fire form an essential component of the heavenly temple of the Lord.

Finally, the Qumran’s Three Tongues of Fire describes the process of discerning the credibility of a prophet through the shimmering of the stones of Urim and Thummim that are placed in the High Priest’s breastplate, which would shine like tongues of fire (1Q29). Menzies notes that this process of discerning is connected to the Day of Atonement and “it would seem that the high priest emerges from the temple before an assembly of all Israel,” to judge the prophetic word.²¹ In this context, 1Q29 speaks of the high priest going forth from the temple to all of Israel with the ephod and tongues of fire to judge a prophetic word. Beale concludes that the tongues of fire mentioned in 1Q29 have a close connection to both the Jerusalem temple and the priesthood “as an expression of God’s revelatory presence.”²²

The collective weight of these four passages leads us to see that the unique phrase “tongues as of fire” is connected to the temple of God, whether heavenly or earthly. For Isaiah, the tongue of consuming fire is an expression of YHWH’s destructive judgement on the enemies of Judah and the protection of Judah and Jerusalem, which proceeds from the temple. For Enoch, the tongues of fire were an essential component of the foundation of God’s heavenly temple. While for the Qumran’s Three Tongues of Fire, the tongues of fire symbolised the revelatory presence of God in and from the temple. Therefore, the phrase “tongues as of fire” is temple imagery, having clear connections to the establishment and preservation of the temple.²³

¹⁹ Menzies, “Pre-Lucan Occurrences,” 34-41; Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple,” 87-91.

²⁰ Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple,” 87.

²¹ Menzies, “Pre-Lucan Occurrences,” 53.

²² Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple,” 90.

²³ Moreover, as Jacqueline N. Grey reflects upon the relationship between spirit and fire in Isaiah 4:4 and notes, “It is the Spirit that is the agent of this essential cleansing, rather than the established cultic rituals. No priest or other human agent is involved. It is the purging fire of the Spirit that will provide the eschatological hope of the purification of the remnant.” See Jacqueline N. Grey, “Redeemed from Fire by Fire: The Burning Spirit and the Daughters of Zion in Isaiah 4.4” in *Grieving, Brooding, Transforming: The Spirit, The Bible, and Gender*, JPTS 46, ed. Cheryl Bridges Johns and Lisa P. Stephenson (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 91-107, *forthcoming*.

This can inform our understanding of the other theophanic imagery used in Acts 2:1-4. While the language of fire (Acts 2:3), wind (2:2) and filling (2:4) can all be connected to the Sinaitic theophany, they can also be connected to the inauguration of the tabernacle and the temple (Exod 40:34-38, 1 Kings 8:10-11, 2 Chron 7:1-3). Moreover, further strengthening the Pentecost-temple connection, while at Sinai the people respond in fear (Exod 20:18), at the temple inauguration the people respond in praise (2 Chron 7:3), which parallels the response to the Pentecost theophany (Acts 2:4, 11). That is, not only does viewing the Pentecost theophany through the lens of the temple explain the general theophanic imagery as well as the Sinai lens does, but it also goes beyond the Sinai lens in its ability to explain the praise at Pentecost, and most importantly, the atypical language of “tongues as of fire.”

1.2 The Explanation of the Pentecost Theophany

Once this temple context is acknowledged, then parallels to the temple appear throughout the narrative of Pentecost. In explaining the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter uses Joel 2:28-32 to defend the actions of the newly Spirit-baptised believers. Therefore, any understanding of the Pentecost theophany must account for Peter’s explanation of this theophany by using Joel 2:28-32. There are three key observations concerning Peter’s use of Joel 2:28-32, which are important for connecting Pentecost to the temple inauguration theophanies.

First, Beale has made the compelling argument that Luke’s modification of μετὰ ταῦτα (after this) to ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις (in the last days) is actually a direct quote from Isaiah 2:2.²⁴ Indeed, the specific phrase ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις is only found in Isaiah 2:2 in the whole LXX, which describes the Lord establishing the eschatological temple and all the nations streaming to this eschatological temple (paralleling Acts 2:5-11).²⁵ This splicing in of Isaiah 2:2 into Acts 2:17 indicates not only that the temple lens is a valid one for the Pentecost narrative, but also further refines this lens to indicate that some sort of inauguration is in view. Therefore, Peter understands the activity of the Spirit at Pentecost as the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy about the spirit of God being poured out on all flesh with Isaiah’s prophecy about the nations streaming to the newly inaugurated eschatological temple.²⁶

Second, the intertextuality of Peter’s use of Joel 2:28-32 does bring the temple into view, as the temple is the primary religious context of Joel 1-2. This context is shown in the mention of priests (Joel 1:9, 13, 2:17) along with elders (Joel 1:2, 14, 2:16), which are the only leaders mentioned in Joel 1-2. Moreover, the “house of the Lord” is a common refrain used in Joel 1 (Joel 1:9, 13, 14, 16), while other references to the temple are found in the second chapter of Joel (Joel 2:15, 16, 17). Finally, Joel has a keen awareness of the effect that the ecological devastation and renewal has on the offerings brought to the temple (Joel 1:9, 13, 2:14).

²⁴ Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple,” 94.

²⁵ Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple,” 94.

²⁶ Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple,” 94.

Moreover, some scholars have even suggested that Joel is a part of the formal temple liturgy, written for times of national lament.²⁷ Dating Joel is difficult, which has led scholars to suggest that Joel has been deliberately dis-historicised so that is adaptable for different crises and time periods.²⁸ That is, Joel could well be a part of the temple liturgy, being used for times of national crisis. Rickie D. Moore develops this further, stating that “Joel is seen as an effective and representative example of the kind of sacred observance anticipated in Solomon’s prayer of temple dedication.”²⁹ Solomon’s prayer at the temple inauguration then provides a significant source for the shape and message of Joel. From this, we can see that the intertextuality of Peter’s use of Joel 2:28-32 brings the theme of the temple and their inaugurations into view in Acts 2.

Third, in this temple context, the prophecy that the spirit of God would be “poured out on all flesh” (Joel 2:28) takes on added significance. This prophecy finds its conceptual roots in the spirit’s coming upon the 70 elders in Numbers 11:24-30.³⁰ While the spirit of God descends upon 68 of these elders placed to stand surrounding the tabernacle, two of the elders—Eldad and Medad—receive the Spirit away from the tabernacle (Num 11:26-27). Joshua’s protest (Num 11:28) leads Moses to express the desire that all the Lord’s people would receive the spirit of God (Num 11:29). In the passage then, Moses sees the universal outpouring of the spirit of God as an event that in some way happens apart from (or even in contrast to) the physical tabernacle, a desire that is turned into a formal prophecy in Joel 2:28.

These three observations—Peter’s splicing in of Isaiah 2:2 into his quotation of Joel 2:28-32, the temple context of Joel 1 and 2, and the formalisation of Moses’ desire in Numbers 11:29—further strengthen the validity of the temple as a lens through which to understand the Pentecost narrative. Moreover, the splicing in of Isaiah 2:2 at Acts 2:17 and the influence of Solomon’s temple inauguration prayer, taken with the parallels with the temple inauguration theophanies and the use of tongues of fire in 1 Enoch, indicates that the Pentecost theophany is not just a temple theophany, but a temple inauguration theophany.

1.3 Further Considerations

It is also important to note three further points concerning the theme of the temple in the Pentecost narrative. First, the context of the temple remains throughout Peter’s Pentecost sermon, as temple texts are consistently referenced throughout Peter’s exposition of the identity of the Lord. The quotation from Joel 2:28-32 ends with the reassurance that calling on the name of the Lord will lead to salvation. In typical Midrashic fashion, this leads Peter to

²⁷ Rickie D. Moore, “Joel,” in *The Book of the Twelve*, Pentecostal Commentary Series edited by John Christopher Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 125-126

²⁸ Moore, “Joel,” 125-126.

²⁹ Moore, “Joel,” 125.

³⁰ Raymond B. Dillard, “Intrabiblical Exegesis and the Effusion of the Spirit in Joel,” in *Creator, Redeemer, Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline*, ed. Howard Griffith and John R. Muether (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 89-91.

expound for the rest of the Pentecost sermon the identity of this Lord, which Peter establishes is Jesus of Nazareth, using almost exclusively the Psalms (Acts 2:22-36).³¹ Beale has methodically worked through each one of the six allusions to the Psalms in Acts 2:22-36, noting that each one is clearly set within the context of the temple.³²

Second, Chris McKinny has made the compelling argument that the whole Pentecost narrative is geographically situated in the temple, and not in the upper room.³³ McKinny argues that Acts 2:5-41 is clearly set in the temple complex, as the temple was the location of Pentecost festivities, where people from every nation would gather (Acts 2:5-11), and where there were enough pools to baptise 3,000 people (Acts 2:41).³⁴ Moreover, the temporal marker at Acts 2:1 could also indicate a geographical change, that is, from the “upper room” (Acts 1:13) to the temple.³⁵ Finally, the language of the “house” being filled with the Spirit of God could have allusions back to God’s house, the temple, being filled with the spirit of God at the temple inauguration (1 Kings 8:10).³⁶ It is then possible, perhaps even probable, that the whole Pentecost narrative is geographically situated in the temple complex.

Third, this reading also fits well with the broader narrative of Luke-Acts, as the replacement of the Jerusalem temple is one of the major questions left unanswered in the Gospel of Luke, which is a point which has not been noted by scholarship focussed on the Spirit in Luke-Acts.³⁷ In Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin, Matthew and Mark both present Jesus as the replacement of the Jerusalem temple, through the false accusation of Jesus destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days (Matt 26:61, Mark 14:58 15:29, see also John 2:19-22). However, this false accusation is missing in Luke’s depiction of Jesus’ Sanhedrin trial (Luke 22:66-71), and although Jesus judges the temple authorities (Luke 19:45-46) no replacement is offered in the gospel of Luke.³⁸ With the preceding argument, the reason for this silence should become obvious, Luke does not see the Jerusalem temple being replaced by Jesus (as the other two synoptic gospels imply), but rather, the physical temple is replaced by the Spirit-empowered Jesus community at Pentecost.³⁹ Seeing the Pentecost theophany as significantly drawing upon the temple inauguration theophanies then connects the narrative of Pentecost with the meta-narrative of creation, as both the tabernacle and the temple are iterations of the ordering of creation described in Genesis 1-2.

³¹ Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple,” 66-74.

³² Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple,” 66-74.

³³ Chris McKinny, “The Location of Pentecost and Geographical Implications in Acts 2,” in *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation*, ed. Barry J. Beitzel (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2019), 77-93.

³⁴ McKinny, “The Location of Pentecost,” 80, 85.

³⁵ McKinny, “The Location of Pentecost,” 80.

³⁶ McKinny, “The Location of Pentecost,” 89.

³⁷ Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple,” 73-74.

³⁸ Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple,” 73-74.

³⁹ Moreover, this explains why there is the conflict between the early Jesus community and the temple authorities in Acts 3-5.

2. Pentecost and the Meta-Narrative of Creation

While most modern western readers of Genesis 1-2 are interested in a scientific understanding of the origins of the universe, when read within its ANE context, Genesis 1-2 describes the creation and ordering of God's temple-city.⁴⁰ Two key moments in Genesis 1-2 best illustrate the ANE temple-city context. First, in the ANE, gods would rest in their temples, which explains why God rests at the end of the first creation narrative (Gen 2:1-3).⁴¹ Second, in the ANE, the image of the god is normally found in their temple, which gives context to God creating humans in the image of God (Gen 1:27).⁴² These two moments then paint the picture of God residing in his temple (i.e. creation) and through his image (i.e. humans).

In addition to these moments, there are numerous parallels between the creation accounts of Genesis 1-2 and the later tabernacle and temple, including;⁴³

1. The verbs to serve (עבד) and to keep (שמר) in Genesis 2:15 are the same words used for the duties of the priests in the tabernacle (Num 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6). This indicates that Adam is seen as a priest in the garden of Eden, not a farmer or herder.
2. God is described as walking through the garden of Eden in the evening (Gen 3:8), which he later repeats in a similar way in the tabernacle (Lev 26:12; Deut 23:15; 2 Sam 7:6-7).
3. Cherubim guard the garden of Eden, which can only be entered from the east (Gen 3:24), as they do in later sanctuaries (Exo 25:18-22; 26:31; 1 Kings 6:23-29).
4. It is possible that the tabernacle menorah (Exo 25:31-35) was developed to be symbolic of the tree of life at the center of the garden of Eden (Gen 2:9, 3:22).
5. Gold and onyx, which symbolized God's presence, is found in the garden of Eden (Gen 2:11-12) and in the tabernacle (Exod 25:7, 11, 17, 31).

The culminative weight of these parallels has led to the consensus that the creation accounts of Genesis 1-2 are describing God building his temple-city, which is Earth. As J. R. Middleton concludes,

Suppose we press the question, what sort of building is God making in Genesis 1? Although not immediately obvious, the unequivocal answer given from the perspective of the rest of the Old Testament is this: God is building a temple. The notion of the cosmos as temple has its roots in the ancient Near Eastern worldview, in which temples were commonly understood as the royal palaces of the gods, in which they dwelled and from which they reigned. Furthermore, creation, followed by temple building and then divine rest, is a central theme in Mesopotamian, and perhaps Ugaritic, mythology.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 81-88; J. H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009); 72-86, T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 114-25.

⁴¹ Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 72-86.

⁴² See the extensive discussion in Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 93-146.

⁴³ These five parallels are taken from Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 117-18.

⁴⁴ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 81.

Genesis 1-2 describes how the whole universe is God's temple, which then finds iterations in the tabernacle and the temple.

What does this mean for our reading of Acts 2 and for the possibility of a Spirit-baptised creation? It places the narrative of Pentecost in the meta-narrative of creation, as the tabernacle, the temple and the disciples at Pentecost are all iterations of God's original temple-city, the Earth. Therefore, Pentecost sits within the meta-narrative of creation, which leads us to revisit the Pentecost narrative to explore the imagery of creation present in this narrative.

3. Further Exegetical Considerations

Locating Pentecost within the meta-narrative of creation leads us to focus on the imagery of creation in Acts 2. There are two further exegetical considerations I would like to note concerning the narrative of Pentecost, both of which occur in Peter's quotation of Joel 2:28-32, which are; the translation of *σάρκα* in Acts 2:17 and the imagery of creation in Acts 2:19-20. While I cannot offer complete arguments here due to space constraints, I will seek to map out the recent pentecostal and charismatic views on Acts 2:17a and 2:19-20, and then offer a more ecologically sensitive reading of these two passages.

3.1 I Will Pour My Spirit Out on All Flesh

In the first line of the quotation of Joel 2:28-32, Peter, following the LXX version, speaks of the Spirit of God being poured out on all *σάρκα* (Acts 2:17). Some prominent English translations see *σάρκα* as exclusively anthropocentric, translating *σάρκα* as "people" (e.g. NIV, NLT), as do some recent pentecostal and charismatic commentators.⁴⁵ However, in light of the previous argument that locates Pentecost in the meta-narrative of creation, could *σάρξ* be understood in a broader, more ecologically inclusive way?

There are indications, in both Joel and the broader use of *σάρξ* in Greek literature, that this pouring out of the Spirit extends to all of creation. First, in the MT text, Joel uses *basar* (בָּשָׂר; flesh), which is used in the Hebrew Bible as referring to all of creation (e.g. Gen 6:19, 7:15, 9:16). An ecological rather than anthropocentric understanding of *basar* is in view in Joel 2:28, as the audience of Joel is inclusive of creation.⁴⁶ Joel begins his prophetic word by addressing "all the inhabitants of the land" (1:2), and then specifically calls creation to lament in the metaphor of a "virgin in sackcloth" (1:8), which it obeys (e.g. 2:18, 2:20).⁴⁷ Moreover, the suffering of creation plays a significant role in the narrative flow of Joel, as Joel indicates that God relents from bringing utter destruction because "the Lord was jealous for the land and

⁴⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1-2:47* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 881-882; Youngmo Cho and Hyung Dae Park, *Acts: Part One: Introduction and Chapters 1-12*, NCCS (Eugene: Cascade, 2019), 54.

⁴⁶ Laurie J. Braaten, "Earth Community in Joel: A Call to Identify with the Rest of Creation," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 63-74.

⁴⁷ Braaten, "Earth Community in Joel," 66.

had pity on the people” (Joel 2:18).⁴⁸ Therefore, the audience of Joel is not only humans, but rather creation wide, which then implies that *basar* can be inclusive of all of creation.

All of this indicates that creation is a significant active character in Joel 1-2, as creation receives the word of the Lord through the prophet Joel, laments and calls out for salvation. Moreover, seeing *basar* as including all of creation in Joel 2:28 also fits well into the overall understanding of the spirit of God’s close association with creation in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Gen 1:2, Psalm 139:7-9). As Moore notes, “The promise of God’s Spirit is first poured out in terminology as wide as creation.”⁴⁹ It is then possible that Joel has all of creation in view when speaking of the outpouring of the spirit in Joel 2:28.

This broad ecological meaning of *basar* can be seen in the LXX’s use of σάρξ in its translation of Joel 2:28. Michael Trainor notes that the Jewish historian Josephus (37–100 C.E.) understands σάρξ as encompassing non-human flesh, which is also a common understanding in the broader Greek literature.⁵⁰ This understanding of σάρξ does have implications for Acts 2:17, as Trainor notes that Luke’s use of σάρξ,

implies an added layer of relationship that is more than anthropocentric. Sarx emphasizes humanity in its relationship to the wider environment and world in which human beings live. The expression underscores a person’s environmental network or relationships that makes one human. ... [Sax] is not exclusively anthropocentric; it also implies the non-human world.⁵¹

It is then likely that both Joel and Luke understood this outpouring of the Spirit of God as extending to all of creation. The Spirit of God is then poured out on all flesh, even non-human flesh.

3.2 Ecological Signs and Wonders

The second, and perhaps more difficult, exegetical consideration is the imagery of creation in Acts 2:19-20. This text describes the coming day of the Lord, which will bring cosmic signs and wonders, with blood, fire, smoke and darkness characterising the sun, moon and stars. Given the centrality of this imagery in the Pentecost narrative, and the tendency for some to read texts like 2 Peter 3:10 into this passage, further attention needs to be given to this imagery if we are to build a constructive ecology from the Pentecost narrative.

Some pentecostal scholars have already noted the difficulty with this imagery. For example, after quoting Acts 2:19–20, Amos Yong states “this is metaphorical language functioning, in

⁴⁸ The mention of YHWH’s pity draws the reader back to the YHWH’s self-revelation in Exodus 34:6-7, which is quoted in Joel 2:13. Interestingly, the language of YHWH’s jealousy then could find parallels with Exodus 34:14, however, in Joel 2:18 it is jealously *for the land* and not necessarily for the people of Israel, who have YHWH’s pity.

⁴⁹ Moore, “Joel,” 165.

⁵⁰ Michael Trainor, *About Earth’s Child: An Ecological Listening to the Gospel of Luke, The Earth Bible Commentary Series* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 38.

⁵¹ Trainor, *About Earth’s Child*, 38.

both Acts and its original context (the prophecy of Joel), as apocalyptic discourse that calls attention to the cataclysmic events attending the arrival of the Day of the Lord and the salvation and vindication of the people of God.”⁵² Yong sees Acts 2:19–20 as describing a cataclysmic event, which is the prelude for the salvation of the people of God. Given the centrality of this imagery for the Pentecost narrative, further work could be done in explaining the meaning of this imagery, in both Joel and Acts.

When exploring the meaning of Acts 2:19-20, there are two questions to consider. First, according to Joel 2:28-32, what is the fate of creation? It is easy to see how this language could be understood as describing the annihilation of creation. However, we must enquire as to what this language meant in the original text, that is Joel 1-2. The cosmic imagery of fire, blood, smoke and darkness is common in Joel, as this imagery is found in the opening chapters of Joel to describe the looming judgement of the unrepentant (Joel 1:19, 2:2-3, 5, 10-11). Joel indicates that one can be saved from this looming judgement by calling on the name of the Lord (2:32). Importantly, Joel 1-2 consistently portrays creation as calling out for salvation, as Joel instructs “all the inhabitants” to lament (1:2), and specifically instructs the “virgin” Earth on her role in this lament (1:8).⁵³ Moreover, Joel describes the lamenting of cattle and sheep (2:18), as well as the wild animals (2:20), indicating that creation has a voice in Joel 1-2 and is obedient to the call to lament in 1:2. With this context in mind, creation’s annihilation is not in view in Joel 2:28-32, as creation has consistently obeyed the prophetic word and cried out for salvation. The main question that Joel 2:28-32 poses is: Will humans with the spirit of God join with creation in calling on the name of the Lord for salvation?

If Joel 2:28-32 does not describe the destruction of creation, what is it describing? I would like to propose here that Luke’s redaction of Acts 2:19-20, indicates that this cosmic imagery is actually describing a prophesying creation.⁵⁴ Luke’s modification of Acts 2:19 sees him link these ecological wonders and signs to the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. Luke slightly changes the “wonders in the heavens and on the earth” (Joel 2:30) to “wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below” (Acts 2:19). That is, Luke adds “signs” to Joel’s language of wonders, creating the couplet of “signs and wonders”, which connects this imagery to the “signs and wonders” of Jesus (Acts 2:22) and the apostles (Acts 2:43). It is God who will show these signs (2:19), just as it is God who worked signs and wonders through Jesus in His earthly ministry and through the apostles. Luke then indicates that creation, just like Jesus and the apostles, performs signs and wonders through the Spirit of God as a part of its prophetic calling and empowerment.

⁵² Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism And The Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 178-79.

⁵³ For the virgin of Joel 1:9 being the Earth see Braaten, “Earth Community in Joel,” 66.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of this imagery in Joel, see Moore, “Joel,” 166-167.

Second, this leads us to see a certain symmetry in Acts 2:17-20. Verse 17 begins with the overarching promise that the Spirit of God would be poured out on all flesh, which the rest of verses 17 and 18 expands, describing the prophetic empowerment of a Spirit-baptised humanity. Once human “flesh” has been addressed, verses 19 and 20 addresses the effect of the outpouring of the Spirit on non-human flesh, describing the prophetic empowerment of a Spirit-baptised creation. The Spirit is poured out on all of creation, and all of creation, in their own way, prophesises. As Trainor notes,

Creation [in Romans 8] participates in God’s redemptive act. For Luke, a similar agency is potentially at work in the non-human world ... which becomes a prophetic voice of God’s presence and action through the presence of the Spirit. In this case, the Spirit is not about vivifying human beings exclusively, but every organism that constitutes Earth.⁵⁵

These ecological signs and wonders—the blood, fire, smoke and darkness—are a further expansion on the Spirit being poured out on all flesh.

Conclusion: Theological and Pentecostal Implications

There is a broader theological implication of this fresh reading of Acts 2. For humans, Pentecost signifies a new relationship between the Spirit of God and humanity, in that, before Pentecost the spirit of God would descend upon select individuals (e.g. kings, priests, prophets) for a limited time and for a specific task (e.g. leadership, prophecy). At (and after) Pentecost, the Spirit of God is now a permanent endowment for all. That is, before Pentecost the Spirit is given in a limited and exclusive way, while after Pentecost the Spirit of God—fulfilling the hopes of a pre-Pentecost humanity (e.g. Num 11:29)—is given to all to empower all of humanity.

Yet, if we see all of creation as baptised in the Spirit at Pentecost, we should question how this narrative arc (from limited to all) applies to creation. Numerous questions need to be considered: Can we say that God’s spirit dwelt in creation in a limited way before Pentecost and only at Pentecost is the Spirit of God fully imminent in creation? Or rather, has God’s spirit always dwelt in creation (pre- and post-Pentecost) in the same way, and the narrative arc only applies to humans? Or maybe a mediating position could be that creation has always been baptised in the Spirit, with Pentecost representing a “refilling” of the Spirit in creation? That is, at Pentecost, are humans simply joining in with creation’s long-standing Spirit baptism? By establishing that all of creation is baptised in the Spirit, we should be cautious about simply applying humanity’s story (or narrative arc) onto creation and should be open to the possibility that creation has a different (but complementary) story in relation to the Spirit of God.

Beyond this theological implication, there are also more practical implications for pentecostalism’s relationship with creation. While pentecostalism in other areas of the world

⁵⁵ Trainor, *About Earth’s Child*, 38.

(mainly the Global South) may have started the process of developing creation care practices, this is largely absent in Australasian pentecostalism and more broadly pentecostalism in the Western world.⁵⁶ Western pentecostalism could follow the Global South's lead and seek to develop some distinct pentecostal creation care practices, like the Zimbabwean pentecostal tree planting "Eucharist" services, or form associations like the AAEC (the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches).⁵⁷ Perhaps it is time for Western pentecostalism to follow the pioneering lead of pentecostals in the Global South, and employ creation care practices in their own backyard.

Importantly, there is cause for optimism, as we may be seeing an Australasian pentecostal ecology emerging from Australian pentecostal worship. As I have argued elsewhere, creation is becoming more prominent in Australian pentecostal worship, with the ecological message reflected in this use of creation becoming more positive.⁵⁸ As worship is the starting place of pentecostal theology, this presents us with an opportunity to move from worship to spirituality and develop distinctively Australian pentecostal creation care practices.⁵⁹ We stand at a pivotal moment for pentecostalism in Australasia, as Australasian pentecostals begin to reflect upon the role of creation in the story of God and as they incorporate the imagery of creation into their worship, we may be witnessing an emerging pentecostal ecology in Australasia.

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⁵⁶ For creation care in the pentecostalism of the Global South see Matthew Tallman, "Healing for a Sick World: Models of Pentecostal Environmentalism in Africa," in *Blood Cries Out: Pentecostals, Ecology, and the Groans of Creation*, ed. A. J. Swoboda (Eugene: Pickwick, 2014): 187-204; Paul Ede, "River from the Temple: The Spirit, City Earthkeeping and Healing Urban Land," in *Blood Cries Out: Pentecostals, Ecology, and the Groans of Creation*, ed. A. J. Swoboda (Eugene: Pickwick, 2014): 205-224; Richard E. Waldrop, "Spirit of Creation, Spirit of Pentecost: Reflections on Ecotheology and Mission in Latin American Pentecostalism," in *Blood Cries Out: Pentecostals, Ecology, and the Groans of Creation*, ed. A. J. Swoboda (Eugene: Pickwick, 2014): 225-234; John D. Griffiths, "Wonders in the Heavens Above, Signs on the Earth Below: Pacific Island Pentecostalism, Climate Change and Acts 2," in *Beyond Belief: Opportunities for Faith-Engaged Approaches to Climate-Change Adaption in the Pacific Islands*, ed. Johannes Luetz and Patrick Nunn (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 329-344.

⁵⁷ Tallman, "Healing for a Sick World," 195-196.

⁵⁸ John D. Griffiths, "All the Earth, Let Us Sing: Searching for a Latent Pentecostal Ecology in Australian Pentecostal Worship," in *Climate Change & Creation Care: Eco-Economic Sustainability, Ecological Integrity and Justice*, ed. Christina Nellist (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), forthcoming.

⁵⁹ For worship as the starting place of pentecostal theology, see Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 26, 31.

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