

Walking with the Spirit through the Book of Acts

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Who is the Holy Spirit?

1. The Spirit is God

³ But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back *some* of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why *is it* that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.” (Acts 5:3-4; NASB)

² While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set Barnabas and Saul apart for Me for the work to which I have called them.” (Acts 13:2; NASB)

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” (Matt 28:19; NASB)

2. The Spirit is advocate

¹⁶ I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may be with you forever; ¹⁷ *the Helper is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know *Him*; *but* you know Him because He remains with you and will be in you. (John 14:16-17; NASB)

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while remaining with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all that I said to you.” (John 14:25; NASB)

⁷ But I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I am leaving; for if I do not leave, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. ⁸ And He, when He comes, will convict the world regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment: ⁹ regarding sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰ and regarding righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you no longer *are going* to see Me; ¹¹ and regarding judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

¹² “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* at the present time. ¹³ But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take from Mine and will disclose *it* to you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine; this is why I said that He takes from Mine and will disclose *it* to you. (John 16:7-15; NASB)

3. The Spirit is our guide through the journey of life

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. ¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, ²⁰ idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Now those who belong to Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let’s follow the Spirit as well. (Gal 5:16-25; NASB)

But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18; NASB)

They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, after being forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. (Acts 16:6; NASB)

²² And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that chains and afflictions await me. (Acts 20:22-23; NASB)

After looking up the disciples, we stayed there for seven days; and they kept telling Paul, through the Spirit, not to set foot in Jerusalem. (Acts 21:4; NASB)

4. The Spirit is a source of power for His purposes

So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (Gal 3:5; NASB)

and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. (1 Cor 2:4; NASB)

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. ⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (1 Cor 12:4-11; NASB)

The Holy Spirit in Today's World

1. Conviction about sin / virtual spaces and flexible morality
2. Focus on the material (bodily comfort) / detachment from the true self (spiritual)
3. Focus on the moment (pleasure) / detachment from judgment (destiny)

What is the Book of Acts?

Acts is part 2 of a two-part history.

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. (Acts 1:1-2; NIV)

What part does the Holy Spirit play?

Acts presents the account of the first witnesses to the Spirit-empowered life.

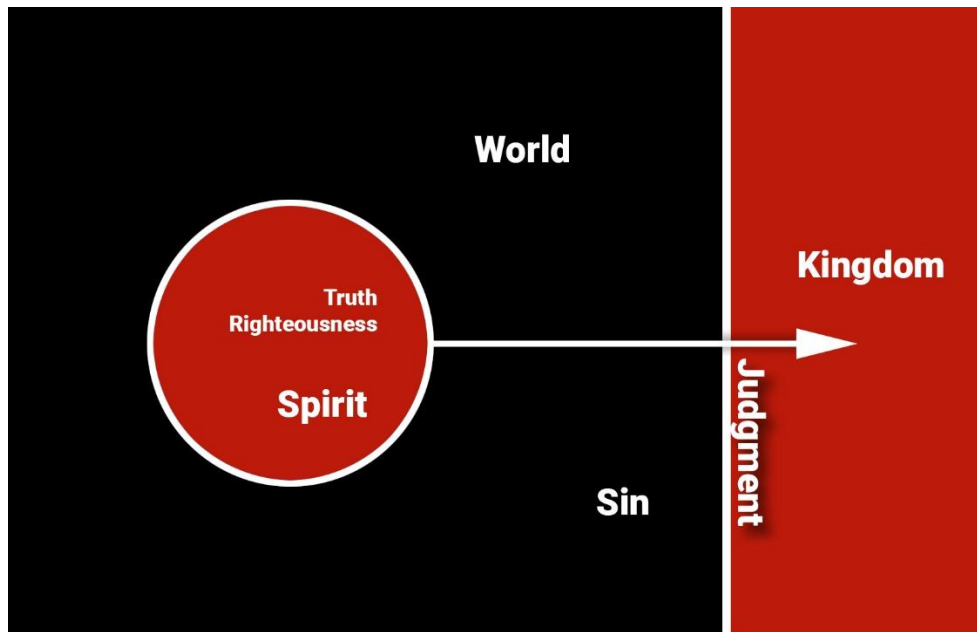
Acts 1 and the framework for the work of the Spirit

1. Christianity is based in a tangible reality—the proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. (Acts 1:3a; NIV)

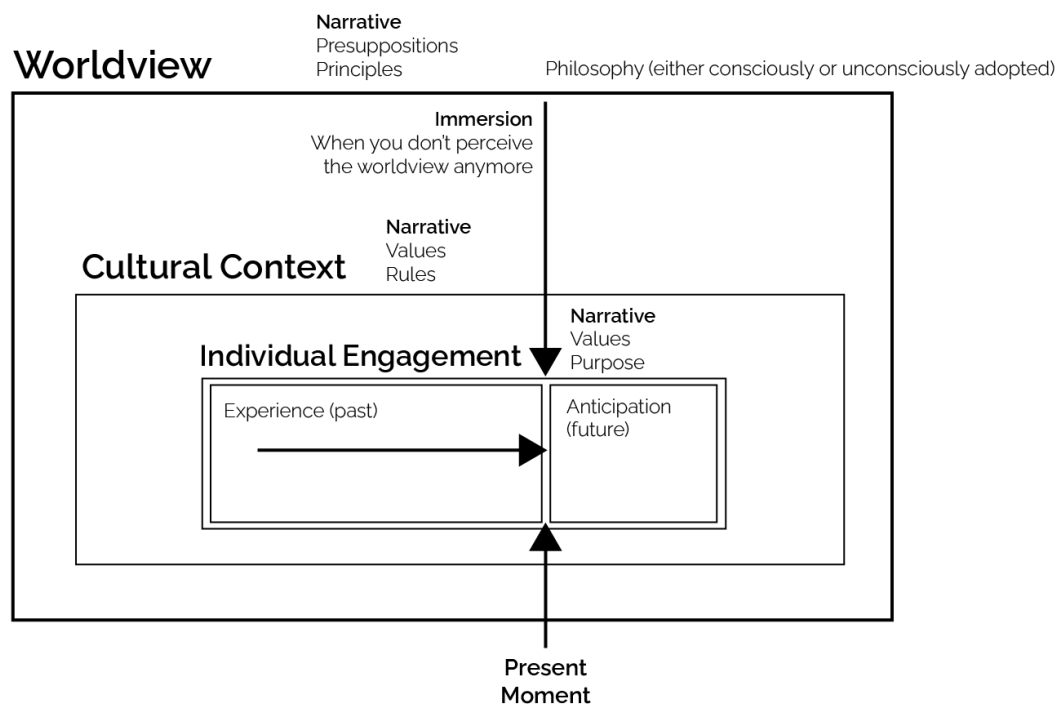
2. The Christian life and mission have a forward view—the Kingdom is the conclusion to the journey that begins in Acts and concludes with this end of this present age. The Kingdom is present and future.

He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3b)



3. Acts reminds us that the gospel is in tension with culture, that we need to be strategic and we need to rely on the Holy Spirit. Jesus predicted we would have trouble in this world (John 16:33)—so the apparent challenges to the gospel in Acts (and in our lives) are expected.

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.” (Acts 1:4)



4. Acts is based on a radical shift in human existence that comes through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is metaphorically identified as baptism. Baptism means change, transition, and death as a gateway to new life.

“For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:5)

John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Luke 3:16)

5. Acts reveals a time frame between the giving of the Spirit and the end of the age (the arrival of the Kingdom), and deliberately avoids any explanation for how long that time will last.

Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” (Acts 1:6-7)

6. Acts reveals the Holy Spirit as our source of power. This is not power for its own sake, but to fulfill our purpose in this life. Our purpose is nothing other than his purpose.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses ...” (Acts 1:8a)

7. God's purpose is realized throughout the world. The work of the Spirit is not limited by time, space, ethnicity, or any other human characteristic. It is powerful across the centuries. It is the same power today, in this corner of the world, that it was then.

"...in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8b)

8. The beginning of this work is specifically indicated by Jesus visibly transitioning his ministry to the church by leaving the earth in plain sight. This image bring closure and implies that we need to focus our eyes on what lies ahead and do what he says.

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. (Acts 1:9)

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. (2 Kings 2:11)

The ascension of Jesus and the start of the church's mission

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11; NIV)

1. The ascent is a tangible sign and motivation for the church to wait for the Spirit and embrace its mission.
2. The ascent typifies the same vision as Elijah's transition and the start of Elisha's ministry.

⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?"

"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied.

¹⁰ "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not."

¹¹ As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. ¹² Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two. (2 Kings 2:9-12)

3. The ascent of Jesus sets up the fulfillment of a key Messianic passage in Ps 110:1.

The LORD says to my lord:

"Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet." (Ps 110:1)

4. The gospels reveal that the ascent was always something anticipated.

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (John 20:17)

5. The ascent sets us the return of Christ (in similar fashion as his departure), in fulfillment of key end-times prophecies such as Daniel 7 and Luke 21:27.

¹³ “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Dan 7:13-14)

²⁷ “At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:27-28)

6. The angels (Acts 1:10) seem to be the same two who provide insight to the disciples at the empty tomb (Luke 24:1-7). Here they perform the same function: providing an explanation of what happened so that there isn't fear or confusion (Acts 1:11).

While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. (Luke 24:4)

7. The disciples are at the Mount of Olives when this occurs (see Acts 1:12). That Jesus is going to return in the same fashion is a fulfillment of Zech 14:4, a prophecy for the coming of the Lord at the end of the age. He appears as a man at the Mount of Olives.

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. (Acts 1:12)

³ Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. ⁴ On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. (Zech 14:3-4)

Choosing a replacement for Judah and the ongoing witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:12-26)

1. The disciples are pictured as faithful Jews who kept the sabbath. (Acts 1:12)
2. The disciples numbered 120 people at this time, and Luke notes that this includes some of the women and the brothers of Jesus (i.e., the children that Mary and Joseph had after Jesus' birth). (Acts 1:13-14)

3. The betrayal of Judah would be seen as a matter of shame and disrepute in ancient culture. Luke makes sure his readers understand that this shame does not reflect on Jesus or the church. (Acts 1:15-20) The resolution is to replace Judah and restore the witness of the twelve disciples.
4. The criteria was to select someone who had been there as part of Jesus' earthly ministry and witnessed his resurrection. Someone in that position would be able to provide an eye-witness testimony of everything that had happened. Paul (for example) would not qualify for this kind of testimony. (Acts 1:21-22)

²¹ "Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, ²² beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." (Acts 1:21-22)

5. The disciples used lots (i.e., flipping a coin) to choose between two equally qualified men, with the hope and expectation God would control the outcome. (Acts 1:23-26)

Side topic: The use of signs (lots, fleeces, etc.) in decision-making

1. Casting lots is something that happens in ancient culture, the same way we might flip a coin or roll dice to determine a random outcome. But in the case of the Old Testament, it occurs on occasion with the expectation that God will affect the outcome for his purposes. (Joshua, in particular, uses this method on numerous occasions.)

"After you have written descriptions of the seven parts of the land, bring them here to me and I will cast lots for you in the presence of the LORD our God." (Joshua 18:6)

2. Gideon is famous for confirming God's orders by asking God to show a sign through a fleece.

³⁶ Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised— ³⁷ look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." ³⁸ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew." ⁴⁰ That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew. (Judges 6:36-40)

3. Despite these examples, the primary way God directs us in our decision making is by commanding us to obey his word.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matt 7:24)

I hold fast to your statutes, LORD;
do not let me be put to shame.
I run in the path of your commands,
for you have broadened my understanding. (Ps 119:31-32)

4. God also directs us to make decisions in accordance with wisdom. Wisdom is principled and conservative decision-making, striving for outcomes that make sense, preserve life, and honor God. It is contrasted with foolishness, which includes decision-making that leads to destructive and harmful outcomes. Wisdom often comes from loving (parental) instruction and sound advice.

The way of fools seems right to them,
but the wise listen to advice. (Prov 12:15)

Listen, my son, accept what I say,
and the years of your life will be many.

¹¹ I instruct you in the way of wisdom
and lead you along straight paths.

¹² When you walk, your steps will not be hampered;
when you run, you will not stumble. (Prov 4:10-12)

5. After the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2, things like lots are not used again in any decision-making. Instead, we see the Holy Spirit as a guide for life, transforming people so that they will make wise and godly decisions. On occasion, when the issue is not holiness or wisdom but rather needing information, the Spirit provides specific instructions or prevents specific actions. This only occurs in the context of ministry, however.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (Acts 13:2)

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. (Acts 16:6)

"I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me." (Acts 20:23)

Pentecost, speaking in tongues, tongues of fire: The Spirit's power and baptism

9. What happened at Pentecost was a fulfillment of Jesus' promise of the coming of the Spirit, after his departure.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4; NIV)

10. The unique characteristics of this event suggest this is not the normal experience of people who receive the Holy Spirit. Rather, it seems a deliberate sign to ensure that the start of the church is framed with unmistakable meaning.

- a) The Spirit is given in a way that is unmistakably supernatural but with a clear manifestation in the physical realm. Whatever it means, possessing the Spirit, it has power and significance in the real (physical) world.
- b) Having tongues accompany this brings the unmistakable message that the work of the Spirit is intended for the entire world, not just Jews in Palestine.
- c) The use of tongues typifies the idea that the work of the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to spread a message. This is not power for its own sake, but to complete a mission that was started by Jesus. Average, everyday people are now empowered for the same kind of ministry: to deliver the same message of the kingdom.
- d) The work of the Spirit comes in direct fulfillment of not only Jesus' promises, but other Old Testament prophecies of the final age leading to the kingdom (see Acts 2:17-21). This event, therefore, connects the past to the present, and the present to the future. The same Spirit who begins this age will end it. The final age (leading to judgment and the kingdom) is upon us.

e) The use of tongues and flames of fire shows that the work is deliberately individualized, though the work itself is for all of us. Each person has the same power but not necessarily the same words.

f) Fire is prophetically associated by John in connection with the kind of baptism that Jesus was bringing (Luke 3:16). The nearest reference that indicates the significance of fire seems to be Jesus' teaching in Luke 12. Fire represents purification and refinement. His people therefore have this as a component in their ministry.

"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!"
(Luke 12:49-50)

g) The scene at Pentecost is radically different than anything seen in the Old Testament and signifies a power never before seen on earth. A full understanding of what it means is not yet evident but becomes increasingly so through the book of Acts.

Pentecost as Reversal of Babel

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ² As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. ³ They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” ⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. ⁶ The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” ⁸ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth. (Gen 11:1-9)

1. The tower of Babel revealed language as the basis for a united resistance to God.
2. The fundamental tension in Babel was the same as in Eden and throughout human history; it is about human ascendancy vs. reliance on God.
3. God impeded their efforts by bringing confusion to their speech, which caused people to move out into the world (i.e., it divided them spatially and ethnically).
4. Human speech continues (through modern media) to be a primary vehicle for resistance to God. The tongue is a restless evil (James 3:8).
5. In the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the motivations underlying humans change, and tongues are used to proclaim the great works of God (Acts 2:11). People are united for the giving of the Spirit and united in their message (Acts 2:1).
6. Those who receive the Spirit are given the ability to ignore language-barriers (which are explained in ethnic terms) and speak a unified message (Acts 2:9-11).
7. The purpose behind all of it is to bring salvation to people who are far off (Acts 2:39). What happens at Pentecost is the announcement and expression of this purpose.

Tongues in Acts & Paul

Tongues in Acts (Luke)	Tongues in 1 Cor 12-14 (Paul)
Tongues (<i>glossai</i>) are languages (2:4).	Tongues (<i>glossai</i>) are languages (13:1; 14:10-11).
Tongues are inspired by the Spirit (2:4). They are part of the wonders and signs prophesied by Joel (2:19).	Tongues are a gift of the Spirit (12:7-11)
Tongues are apparently not understood by the speaker (2:4)	Tongues are not understood by the speaker unless the speaker is supernaturally given understanding (14:13-15)
Tongues can be understood by someone who knows the language (2:8-11) but not to those who don't (2:13).	Tongues are understood when they are interpreted (which is a specific gift in its own right) (12:10, 30; 14:13)
Those who don't understand the tongues mistake it for drunkenness (2:13)	Those who don't understand the tongues (i.e., if there is no interpretation) may assume the speaker is out of their mind (14:23)
Pentecost depicts those who receive tongues (each/all of those who were in the original house or room, 2:4) vs. others who merely witnessed it (2:6). In other words, not everyone is depicted as receiving tongues.	Not everyone is given the gift of tongues (implied in 12:10; 14:22; specifically noted in 12:30, where the question is asked in a way where the answer must be "no").
Tongues functions as a sign to unbelievers (2:11-13)	Tongues functions as a sign to unbelievers (14:22)
In some contexts, tongues are not interpreted or understood (10:46; 19:6) with no obvious ministerial function, but clearly to edify the individual.	Without a gift of interpretation, tongues are not interpreted or understood (14:2, 16-19). But there is still edification to the individual who has the gift (14:4).
Tongues are viewed in positive terms (as a sign of the Holy Spirit) in Acts, whether or not they are understood. But none of the examples of tongues happen in the context of a worship service. They all appear spontaneously when the Spirit first comes upon people.	Tongues are viewed in positive terms in 1 Corinthians (Paul wishes all to receive the gift, 14:5, and has it himself, 14:18) except when it brings disorder to the worship service (14:26-28, 40). In other words, some believers have the ability to manifest the gift at will.

1. Tongues differ between Acts and 1 Corinthians in *function*. In Acts, it is spontaneous as the Spirit is first given to believers. In 1 Corinthians, it is a voluntary exercise that occurs in the context of worship. These aren't two types of tongues; they are different contexts and purposes. In Acts, the gift is the Spirit (Acts 2:28) and tongues is a result of a "filling"

by the Spirit (2:4). In 1 Corinthians, tongues is a gift from the Spirit (1 Cor 12:4, 10-11) for the common good of building up the body of Christ.

2. There is no definite, notable difference between the manifestation of tongues in Acts and 1 Corinthians except that, in Acts, there is no gift of interpretation (but it is not necessary because the tongues are known languages that are understood by some of the people present).
3. Nothing follows from this about the linguistic nature of tongues (whether a known language or not), though Paul indicates that tongues requires supernatural interpretation (which implies that it is not a known language, normally), and he uses the expression “the tongues of men or of angels” (1 Cor 13:1) which implies that while tongues is a language, the language may not be human.
4. The Spirit is given as a second work in Acts as the Spirit moves out to different groups of people (e.g., Acts 10:44-48). But every indication is that this baptism occurs directly in connection with receiving the Spirit at the point of salvation (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 12:12-13), not as a secondary work of the Spirit subsequent to salvation.
5. Scripture doesn’t instruct believers to be baptized in the Spirit but rather to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 4:5).
6. Gifts of the Spirit can apparently be given at any time after salvation (see 1 Cor 14:1, where Paul instructs them to desire the gifts, cf. also 1 Cor 12:31). Gifts are distributed according to the will of the Spirit, which implies he can give them at any time (1 Cor 12:11). Paul wishes they would all receive tongues (1 Cor 14:5), which implies they may yet receive the gift. In other words, the gifts of the Spirit are not the same as the baptism of the Spirit.
7. There are no biblical grounds for asserting that tongues (or any other gift) cannot manifest in today’s world. Such a claim limits the Spirit’s ability to do what he determines (1 Cor 12:11). The only indication of a time when the gifts will end is the state of perfection which will occur in eternity, after the return of Christ (1 Cor 13:8-10). In such a state, the gifts would not be needed.
8. All this said, the gift of tongues can be counterfeited, like any of the gifts, but without a clear way to establish its validity. An unnatural preoccupation with this gift (or any gift that does not have an explicit point of validation) is suspicious. Paul’s emphasis is therefore on gifts that tangibly build up others (1 Cor 14:17-19). The validation to the work of the Spirit is the edification of his people.

The Spirit in Your Life vs. Gifts in Your Life

1. When you trust in Christ, you are given the Holy Spirit. This gift is the key to the life you need, a life that never ends. But you still have the ability to grieve the Spirit (Eph 4:30), resist the leading of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-18, 25), and let something other than the Spirit fill (control) your life (Eph 5:18).
2. Gifts are special capacities for the Holy Spirit to work through your life for the edification of God's people. These gifts are distributed the way the Spirit determines, and your role in the church is typically related to the gift(s) you are given (1 Cor 12:7-31). We are not all given the same gifts.
3. Possessing and using a gift can be a blessing to you, as you see God work in and through you. But not all gifts are the same with regard to their role and significance in the body of Christ. Gifts that strengthen the body are more desirable than ones that merely encourage you as an individual. Paul therefore downplays tongues, which has a limited role in encouraging others, and elevates those which bring understanding. I would go so far as to say (and I think Paul would agree) that tongues is perhaps the least important gift in the list (in practical terms), and yet it is one that has a veneer of supernaturalism, which can lead to pride.
4. Paul puts all the gifts as secondary to love (1 Cor 13). Love is the focus of God's essence and the expression of the Spirit's power in and through us. When the gifts go away in eternity, love will remain. Any expression of the Spirit which does not occur as an outpouring of love is therefore misdirected. What God wants for each of us is that we become a certain kind of person. The Spirit actively works to change us.

Prophecy and the Outpouring of the Spirit

1. When the Spirit is given, it happens in a context where the word is proclaimed. (Acts 2:14-36)
2. In the first stage of his sermon, Peter explains that the outpouring of the Spirit was always part of God's plan (Acts 2:17-21, quoting Joel 2:28-32). In other words, a supernatural manifestation of God's power among his people was part of the plan for the last days.
3. In the second stage of his sermon, Peter relates Jesus' ministry (including signs and wonders) to a fulfillment of prophecy regarding the Messiah. For David's words in Ps 16:8-11 and Ps 110:1 to be true, Messiah had to die and ascend to God.
4. The combination of these two components (the Spirit coming and the Messiah leaving) forms the basis for the church age. To participate in the great work of God, one must repent and receive the gift of the Spirit. Peter adds to this the need to be separated from the corruption of the current generation (Acts 2:38-40).
5. The result was that the church increased to more than 3000 people. This number increased through the ministry of the apostles and the unity of the church (Acts 2:41-27).
6. Prophecy and power continue to be the basis for our vision, faith, and behavior as we wait (together, in unity) for the return of our Lord and Savior.

The Man Lame from Birth as a Case Study in the Power of the Spirit

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶ Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” ⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. (Acts 3:1-10)

1. When God is preparing to work powerfully, he controls all the precedents.

2. The man had a need and expressed a desire for help.

⁴ Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.” ⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ He was amazed at their lack of faith. (Mark 6:4-6)

3. God drew Peter and John’s attention to this man (Acts 3:4). They saw something in him that led them to act.

4. God’s intention and power surpassed the man’s need and expectation (Acts 3:3-6). The absence of their ability to help him monetarily meant room for the Spirit to work and bring attention to himself.

5. What happens occurs through the name (authority) of Jesus (Acts 3:6; see 3:16, 4:7, 4:10, 12, 17-18, etc.)

6. The outcome is that attention is drawn to the power of God. (Acts 3:9-10)

7. Peter confirms that this has nothing to do with him but rather God. (Acts 3:11-13)