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Item Type	Article
Authors	Embudo, Lora Angeline
Publisher	APTS Press
Rights	All rights reserved
Download date	2026-11-04 11:40:04
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/167620

[AJPS 20.2 (2017), pp. 131-146]

Women Vis-À-Vis Prophecy in Luke-Acts: Part 2

by Lora Angeline B. Embudo

Introduction

In Part 1, we surveyed the modern scholarship on Luke's treatment of women in relation to prophecy. We specifically studied key passages in the evangelist's Gospel, with the goal of ascertaining his purview on women in prophetic ministry. In Part 2, we shall discuss key passages in the Book of Acts using a more textual critical approach. The findings will then be synthesized and unified under a pervading theological motif. It is this paper's aim to reveal a timeless Lucan message not only for the first century church, but also for the Filipino church today.

Prophesying Women in Luke-Acts

Prophesying Daughters in the Acts Narrative (Acts 2:17-28; 21:9)

The rest of Luke's Gospel shifts its focus to Jesus, who in his earthly ministry functioned as the eschatological prophet, par excellence. The motif on "women and prophecy" picks up after Christ's ascension, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18), and with the mention of Philip's daughters (Acts 21:9).

Textual-Critical Implications of Acts 2:17-18

Acts 2:17-18 is the first part of Luke's Petrine sermon (2:17-21) that aimed to explain the events the crowd witnessed on the day of Pentecost (2:1-13). Lucan Peter explained that the believers who spoke in different tongues were not drunk, but rather the glossolalia and ecstatic displays were a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in Joel 2:28-32 (3:1-5 LXX). Here we read dialectic, in a formula much like the *pesharim* in the Qumran

scrolls.[1] Luke was saying, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." Joel 2:28-32 was a prophecy set in the backdrop of his summons to true repentance. Israel had just endured an invasion of locusts, a precursor of worst things to come in "the day of the Lord" (1:1-2:17). After assuring the people that God will take pity on them and restore them (2:18-27), he prophesied that the Spirit will be poured out, with accompanying wonders in the sky and on the earth (2:28-31) and that those who called on the name of the Lord will be delivered (2:32). This outpouring was "for all people," and the result will be that they will prophesy and see visions. According to Joel, the sign of the Spirit's in-breaking activity (and of God's activity and presence as well) is prophetic inspiration accompanied by visions and dreams.

Thus, when Lucan Peter explained the ecstatic events witnessed by the crowd, he pointed to the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. The glossolalia and exuberance were but prophetic activities akin to Old Testament prophetic behavior (1 Sam. 10:5-6, 10-13; 19:20-24). Simply said, the Pentecost event was the astounding fulfillment of God's promise to pour out His Spirit in the days of the Lord.

Due to several departures from the LXX, many have agreed that Luke was not just quoting the Joel passage; rather he interpreted and applied it to the current situation.[2] In relation to the current study, four textual changes from the LXX will help us understand the implications of Acts 2:17-18 for women vis-à-vis prophecy: (1) change from μετά ταῦτα to ἐν ταις ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις and insertion of λέγει ὁ θεός in Acts 2:17a; (2) insertion of γε in Acts 2:18a; (3) double insertion of μου after male servants and female servants in Acts 2:18a; and (4) addition of και προφητεύσουσιν in Acts 2:18b.

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[1]There is dialectic in Peter's sermon. On one end is the significance of the Pentecost event as the fulfillment of a prophecy; while on the other end is the significance of an obscure prophecy as understood in light of current events. This can be compared to the Pesharim, an exegetical method used by writers of the Qumran scrolls. With it they interpret a prophecy relevant to the present time. The approach is much more common in Luke's Petrine Sermon and reflects Luke's knowledge of early apostolic preaching. Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1-2:47* vol. 1 (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 873-874.

[2]Most scholars agree that Luke translated from the Septuagint and not from the Hebrew scripture due to the predominance of Septuagintal terms and ideas. Regardless, the Septuagint translation of Joel 3:1-5 has no major variations from the Hebrew. John Stratzicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture and the Scripture's Use of Joel: Appropriation and Resignification in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2007) 255-287; c.f. Josep Ruis-Camps and Jenny Reed-Heinundinger, "The Message of Acts in Codex Bezae: a Comparison with the Alexandrian Traditions," *Library of New Testament Studies* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 181.

a. Change from μετά ταῦτα to ἐν ταις ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις and insertion of λέγει ὁ θεός in Acts 2:17a

Joel begins his prophecy with the phrase καὶ ἔσται μετὰ ταῦτα (*and it shall come to pass afterwards*), a generic temporal expression which simply states that the event prophesied will happen sometime in the future.[3] Contextualizing this, Luke's Petrine sermon specifies the temporal frame to ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις (*in the last days*).[4] This alteration is most likely theological rather than stylistic. It has the effect of specifying the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy to an eschatological time. According to Peter's sermon, this eschatological time has dawned and the astounding events at Pentecost are signs of its arrival.[5] The insertion of λέγει ὁ θεός (*says God*) further highlights the significance of the events that will come about, since God is identified as the speaker of the quotation. Plus, the prophetic formula placed clause-medially serves as a focus marker, giving prominence to the core of Peter's sermon, viz. the outpouring of the Spirit.[6]

Thus, both alterations contextualize Joel 2 to the discourse context of Acts 2.[7] It theologically emphasized that the events of Pentecost belong to the activity of God in the last days. The in-breaking of prophetic activity is an eschatological act of God and is a prolepsis to the consummation of the kingdom. Interestingly, this prophetic enabling is not limited to key church figures; instead, it is available to the entire community, even to women. This exemplary inclusion is reinforced by Luke's insertion of γε in Acts 2:18a.

b. Insertion of γε in Acts 2:18a

Runge poses a dilemma in determining the function of the clause καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας (*and on the male slaves and on the female slaves)* in Joel 3: 2 (LXX).[8] He proposes these two options: (1)

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[3]C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles: The Acts of the Apostles vol. 1* (London, UK: T & T Clark, 1994, 2004), 136.

[4]Steve Runge, "Joel 2:28-32a in Acts 2:17-21: The Discourse and Text-Critical Implications of Variations from the LXX" in 'Greek Bible' Section, *Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting* (San Diego, CA: Nov. 17-20, 2007), 3.

[5]Peter's "last days" did not begin at Pentecost. It began during the birth of the Messiah (Luke 1-2), and will be consummated in His return (Acts 1:6-7). Keener, *Acts vol. 1,* 878-879.

[6]Runge proposes that. by placing the formula clause-medially (and not clause-initial or clause-final), Luke effectively delayed the disclosure of what will happen, creating a greater sense of expectancy. Runge, 3.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Runge notes that the clauses in Joel 3:1c-1d, "And your sons and daughters will prophesy, and your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions,"

the clause is fronted in a contrastive manner, similar to vv. 3:1c-1d; or (2) the clause was fronted for emphatic purposes.[9] If it is contrastive, then the clause will answer the question: "In comparison to the elders or young men, what happens to the male slaves and female slaves when they receive the Spirit?" But if it is emphatic, then the clause functions to answer the question, "Who else will receive the Spirit's prophetic gift?" Either way is plausible for the text; but Runge concludes that, in the case of the LXX, the function of the clause is ambiguous.[10]

Runge's conclusion is why Luke's insertion of γε in Acts 2:18a is worth deliberating. In Luke's rendition, he begins the clause with a prepositional phrase "καί γε" (*kai ge,* and even) before he mentions the topical clause. Considering the ambiguity of the LXX, this insertion has the effect of disambiguating the function of the topical clause ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας μου (*and even on my male slaves and on my female slaves*).[11] The preposition γε clarifies that the speaker is not contrasting the topics, but rather he is emphasizing the extreme extent of the Spirit's outpouring.[12] Basically, Luke's Petrine sermon declares, "Who else shall receive the outpouring of the Spirit? The young, the old,—even my male and female servants!" Luke makes explicit the inclusivity or impartiality of the eschatological gift, which was ambiguous in Joel's prophecy. This properly suggests that, for Luke, the Spirit of prophecy surmounts socio-cultural, age, and gender barriers. The exemplary extent of the Spirit's reception only reinforces the idea that the entire community of believers (regardless of age, gender, or status) is expected to be an eschatological community of prophets.[13]

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functioned contrastively—that is, sons and daughters and old men and young men were fronted to show how they are different from each other. However, the function of the next clause in verse 2, "Even on the male and female slaves, I will pour out my spirit in those days," is a bit uncertain. Runge wonders if the clause was fronted for a contrastive purpose or for an emphatic purpose. Runge, 5.

[9]Runge, 5.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Runge explains that when two coordinating conjunctions are used together, they often function to disambiguate the intended meaning of a clause. Ibid., 4.

[12]Runge, 5.

[13]For a discussion on the prophethood of all believers see Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke's Charismatic Theology* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 2003), 114-124; cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church: The Challenge of Luke-Acts to Contemporary Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011); cf. Keener, *Acts* vol. 1, 282-283.

c. Double insertion of μου after male servants and female servants in Act 2:18a

Luke's double insertion of μου in ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας μου (*in my male servants and in my female servants*) effectively conveys their role as God's own bondservants, rather than some generic slave. These words echo Mary's response to Gabriel in Luke 1:38, when she identified herself as the δούλη (*female bondservant*) of God. Mary serves as an example of a bondservant, that of being an agent of God's purposes in the eschaton. In the same way that she was used as a prophetic witness, believers who submit themselves to God as His bondservants may also receive prophetic enabling.

d. Addition of καὶ προφητεύσουσιν in Act 2:18b

Undoubtedly, the insertion of this phrase is a theological reinforcement. In Joel's prophecy we can already identify the prophetic character of the Spirit's outpouring. But Luke's Petrine sermon makes it more explicit by inserting the phrase, καὶ προφητεύσουσιν *(and they will prophesy)*. He makes clear that the result of the eschatological gift is prophetic power. The Spirit poured out is the Spirit of prophecy. The recipients of this gift are members of the community of salvation and bondservants of God regardless of age, status, or gender (e.g. Mary).

Philip's Four Prophesying Daughters (Acts 21:9)

Some 25 years after Luke's Petrine sermon, Luke mentions Philip's prophesying daughters in Acts 21:9, the verse stating:

[9] τούτῳ δὲ ἦσαν θυγατέρες τέσσαρες παρθένοι προφητεύουσαι. (21:9 GNT)	[9]And he had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. (21:9 RSV)

Noticeably, the text is not relevant to the point that Luke was making about Paul's missionary travel and purposeful moving towards Jerusalem (see context Acts 20:16-21:17). However, a majority of scholars today agree that Luke's intent for this text had to do with both casting a favorable light on Philip and maintaining his motif on gender balance.[14] In the Lucan gospel, he often paired male and female prophets (e.g., Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Zechariah, Simeon and Anna). Now in Acts, he does so again, pairing Philip's four daughters with the

[14]Keener, *Acts vol. 1,* 3090.

prophet Agabus. The implication was that these four daughters were prophets too. This gender pairing also provides a narrative example of the fulfillment of Acts 2:17, "Your sons and daughters will prophesy." Luke's programmatic style of writing shows how the promise of 2:17-21 slowly came into fulfillment as the Gospel spread from Jerusalem and beyond and as the Christian communities flourished.

Interestingly, use of the present participle προφητεύουσαι (*propheteuousai*, who prophesied) instead of the noun προφῆτις (prophetess, Luke 2:36) demonstrates Luke's emphasis on the daughters' regular prophetic activity. By inference, these daughters' prophesying was accepted in their community and was considered as a source of honor for their Spirit-filled father.[15] It also indicated the existence of a self-sustaining charismatic community in Caesarea, which may be a proof of the fulfillment of the Pentecost promise.[16]

Some have argued that Luke's non-mention of the daughters' prophetic words signified his goal to either silence them or perhaps to lessen their authority.[17] But this is probably not the case. At the narrative level, Agabus' prophecy was more germane to the point Luke was making about Paul. Warnings to Paul about suffering in Jerusalem had been given in Acts 21:4 and 21:11. Some suggest that perhaps the daughters' prophesying also included warnings to Paul.[18] But since this assumption cannot be proven, we can best surmise that Luke preferred to highlight Agabus' prophetic words and actions, because it propelled the narrative forward. This does not mean that Luke lowered the authority or significance of the four daughters. It only means that he focused on that which could contribute to the overall plot of the story without undermining his motif on gender balance. [19]

Luke's inclusion of this text tells us that he and the early Christian community acknowledged the prophetic function and role of women. In fact, Eusebius indicates that these sisters were famous and enjoyed

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[15]In Luke's day, the behavior of children could either bring honor or dishonor to the parents. Being a man of the Spirit, Phillip would have been honored by the community because of the Spirit-filledness of his four virgin daughters. It would also identify him as a man fit for his evangelistic/prophetic office. Keener, 3092; cf. Turid Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke and Acts* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, Ltd., 1994), 181; cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, SBL Diss. Ser. 39 (Missoula, MT, 1977), 53.

[16]Seim, 182-183.

[17]Mary Rose D' Angelo, "Women in Luke Acts: A Redactional View," *Journal of Biblical Literature 109/3* (1990), 453-460; cf. F. Scott Spencer, "Out of Mind, Out of Voice: Slave-Girls and Prophetic Daughters in Luke-Acts," *Biblical Interpretation 7, 2* (1999), 150; Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 95-96.

[18]Grudem, 95.

[19]See also Craig Keener, *Acts vol.1*, 3091-3092.

public recognition from the first century and onwards.[20] They were said to have died in Asia Minor, where charismatic activity was ongoing and somewhat ecstatic in the early centuries.[21] Thus, Turid Seim's observation was correct when she wrote: "For Luke, the daughters' share in the gift of the Holy Spirit equipping them for prophetic activity is a significant feature of the eschatological fulfillment as promised by the prophet Joel."[22] Simply said, Luke's record of prophesying daughters, although fewer in Acts, gives evidence to the continued prophetic activity of women in the Christian communities.

Synthesis—Implications of Prophesying Daughters in Acts

The first part of Luke's Petrine sermon, Acts 2:17-18, explicitly declares that, in the last days, women are also recipients of the promised prophetic gift, regardless of age or status. The only qualifications needed are that they should be members of the salvific community and that they are willing to be bondservants of God. This eschatological gift was promised in the prophecy of Joel and realized on the day of Pentecost. It is characterized by prophetic enabling accompanied by visions and dreams. Its recipients are not gender-bound, for the Spirit of prophecy is inclusive and impartial. The in-breaking of prophecy among God's people is both: (1) a sign that the believers have entered the interim era of the last days and (2) a vocational empowerment for the task of witnessing. A proof that the impartiality or inclusivity of this promise has been realized is Luke's record of Philip's four prophesying daughters in Acts 21:9, which can be dated twenty-five years after Peter's Pentecost sermon. Luke's mention of them certainly indicates that women continued to be active in prophecy in the communities and that their prophesying was an accepted practice of the church.

Conclusion and Contemporary Relevance

Conclusion

We can better understand Luke's perspective on "women and prophecy" within his motif on the dawn of the eschatological era. He emphasized that the eschatological era is characterized by the outpouring of the Spirit, which results in the universalization of prophetic activity. These activities include inspired verbal utterance, charismatic revelation, signs and wonders, and Spirit-inspired joy—all of which overflow in

[20]Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclessiastica III*, AD 326, 31.39; cf. Seim, 181.
[21]Seim, 181.
[22]Ibid., 183.

praise. The intensity of prophetic activity in the community of both male and female believers serves as a sign that the "last days" has begun. It is also a prolepsis to the consummation of the kingdom.

This eschatological era is also characterized by status reversal, which is linked with the fulfillment of God's covenant purposes. Luke reversed the status of women, who in his days were marginalized. The barren, the virgin maiden, the widow, and the single daughters represent women on the outskirts of society. Both Jewish and Greco-Roman structures predominantly silenced their voices and confined them to the sphere of the household. Yet Luke portrays how the Spirit of God chooses women as agents of His revelation and proclamation. They are raised from obscurity and their status reversed. In the Kingdom of God, those who are lowly are lifted high; those who are silenced prophesy; those who are found incredible are validated. The presence of God among His people is the underlying power behind this reversal.

Lastly, the eschatological era is characterized by inclusivity or impartiality not only of salvation, but also of prophetic empowerment. The outpouring of the Spirit is upon "all flesh," and the call and enablement for prophetic ministry are inclusive and impartial—as inclusive and impartial as the salvation offered by Christ. There is now only one ministering body—Christ's body—to which believers belong. Ministry is thus founded on the freedom and responsibility of being part of the Body of Christ and in having received prophetic/charismatic empowerment. Therefore, gender, race, age, or social status no longer define ministerial qualification. Rather, identification with Christ and Spirit-giftedness enables and qualifies one to participate in end-time ministries.

Hence, for Luke, the prophetic activity of women is an expected exemplary phenomenon that serves both as a sign of the dawning of the eschatological age and as a vocational empowerment for last-days' witness. Scriptural evidence strongly negates the idea that Luke distanced women from prophecy. His careful arrangement of sources not only validates the prophethood of women, but also encourages its proper and continuous observance. Moreover, Luke was never ambiguous in relating women to the prophetic ministry. Instead, he makes explicit what was ambiguous in Joel's prophecy. It is, therefore, only right to conclude that Luke considers the prophetic ministry of women as acceptable for the church of his day.

Contemporary Relevance for Today's Church

From a hermeneutical standpoint, Luke-Acts sets a repeatable biblical precedent for the church today.[23] Luke teaches via biblical narrative a timeless truth that is applicable for the church in the interim. This truth states that, in the last days, the Spirit of prophecy will be given to all believers for the task of universal witness (Acts 1:8; 2:17-39). There is an urgency and radical tone to this task, so much so that everyone—whether male or female, young or old, slave or free—is called to participate (Luke 10:1-16; Acts 2:1-39; 21:9). There are no longer gender or race requirements, but only the necessity of faith in Christ (Acts 2:38-39) and the eager reception of the gift of the Spirit (Luke 11:9-13) for those willing to be God's δούλους /δούλας. This eschatological task will continue in the inter-advent until Jesus' glorious return (Acts 3:21).

Contemporary Relevance for the Filipino Church

This conclusion is encouraging, especially to Filipino women in church ministry. Although the Philippines ranked 7th among 144 countries in the world in terms of gender parity, it falls to the 61st position in terms of women in ministerial position.[24] It seems that, amid the country being predominantly Christians, it still has inhibitions as to women occupying ministerial positions. For instance, the Roman Catholic Church still denies the priesthood of women and relegates them to lay positions in the church. Also, the majority of Evangelical churches deny the prophetic voice of women, preferring their silence in the assembly or limiting their roles to non-verbal ministries. While this may be amenable to those women who have neither calling nor gifting in verbal ministries, what about those gifted prophetically? What about

[23]Gordon Fee wisely points out that, "In matters of Christian practice, a biblical precedent that comes to us by way of narration or implication alone may often be regarded as a repeatable pattern for the later church." Gordon Fee, "Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, eds. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothius (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 245-246.

[24]The Global Gender Gap Index of 2016 reported that the Philippines ranked 7th out of 144 countries in the world in terms of gender parity. However, Filipino the number of women in ministerial positions only garnered a score of 0.250, landing them in the 61st rank. World Economic Forum, "The Global Gender Gap Report 2016," http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/economies/#economy=PHL (accessed March 2, 2017).

those gifted and called to preach, teach, exhort, and expound Scripture?[25] Are they to remain silent? The answer is, of course, a clear "no!"

This study in Luke-Acts has already demonstrated that the Spirit of God empowers both men and women in the last days. There is a promise for the outpouring of the Spirit on the entire Christian community. This outpouring serves to empower everyone to participate in God's end-time activities. A limitation on women based on their gender and not on their gifting is discouraging for the mission of the Filipino church, especially in light of the Filipino diaspora.

Studies show that, in 2015, at least 2.4 million Filipinos worked abroad as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW).[26] The percentage of female OFWs was higher than that of males (51.1 % vs. 48.9%).[27] This means that Christian Filipino women are dispersed around the globe as domestic helpers, nurses, English teachers, etc., some of whom may have the call and gifting to be end-time prophets of Christ. Equipping, ordaining, and encouraging these women would contribute greatly to the proclamation of the Gospel in areas where traditional church programs cannot reach. The Filipino church must consider that this diaspora may be part of God's plan. Luke-Acts makes it clear that the Spirit's gender inclusivity is meant to not only edify the church, but also for efficient gospel witness. Perhaps it is time to recognize that the Filipina Christian is an untapped potential for the church's end-time mission.

In light of this, the Filipino church should consider taking steps to encourage the acceptance and practice of biblical equality in the church. This move towards parity in ministerial roles is not for feminism's sake, but ultimately for the fulfillment of the church's mission in the world.

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[25]Ellis notes that prophetic ministry includes: forth-telling, foretelling, exhortation, teaching, healing, and expounding Scripture (like Jesus' earthly ministry). He concludes that the role of the prophet may overlap with that of the elder as it does that of the apostle and teacher, especially in certain teaching functions. E. Earle Ellis, "The Gospel of Luke*," New Century Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), 170 ff.; cf. Colin Brown, "Prophet," *New International Dictionary of the New Testament, Voumel. 3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 87-89.

[26]The Philippines Statistics Authority, "Total number of OFWs estimated at 2.4 million (Results from the 2015 survey on Overseas Filipinos)," https://psa.gov.ph/content/total-number-ofws-estimated-24-million-results-2015-survey-overseas-filipinos (accessed March 3, 2017).

[27]Ibid.

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